

**TORTURE, FICTION, AND THE REPETITION OF HORROR:
GHOST-WRITING THE PAST IN ALGERIA AND ARGENTINA**

Torture, Fiction and the Repetition of Horror: Ghost-writing the Past in Algeria and Argentina

The object of this thesis is to study the attempts made by writers and filmmakers in two very different socio-cultural contexts to depict and elucidate the experience of political violence, particularly torture, in the periods 1954-1962 and 1976-1983. I seek to apply the hypotheses of Anglo-American and French theorists with an interest in historical representation, as well as trauma, to both 'realist' and experimental accounts of the widespread oppression that occurred during the Algerian war of independence and later during the so-called 'Dirty War' in Argentina. The texts analysed in detail include novels and short stories by Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, Julio Cortázar and Luisa Valenzuela; the films I examine most closely are the Algerian-Italian 'docudrama' *La Bataille d'Alger* and the Argentine melodrama *La historia oficial*. However, the thesis also addresses other non-factual portrayals of brutality, such as the *Nouvelle Vague*'s meditations on decolonization, and autobiographical writings, such as military memoirs and survivors' testimony, as a means of elaborating more fully on the issues at stake in the works cited above. It explores the difficulty – and the possibility – of giving voice to histories that simultaneously resist and demand articulation, and ultimately, of reconstituting the fragmented or 'disappeared' subject through narrative: of using fiction to summon the 'ghosts' of the past.

Qu'est-ce qu'une violence qu'on appelle torture? Où commence-t-elle? Où finit-elle? Qu'est-ce qu'une souffrance infligée ou reçue dans ce cas? Quel est son corps, son fantasme, son symbole...?

Jacques Derrida, *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre*

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It is dedicated to my family.

INTRODUCTION

FIRST CLIPPING (*DENUNCIA*)

Julio Cortázar's short story, 'Recortes de prensa', tells of a woman writer who is asked to compose a text to accompany a set of sculptures on the theme of political violence, and specifically, torture. When she visits the sculptor's house, she is relieved to discover that his oeuvre is quasi-abstract in expression, that no writhing bodies have been chiselled, explicitly, from the stone:

Me gustó que en el trabajo del escultor no hubiera nada de sistemático o demasiado explicativo, que cada pieza constuviera algo de enigma y que a veces fuera necesario mirar largamente para comprender la modalidad que en ella asumía la violencia; las esculturas me parecieron al mismo tiempo ingenuas y sutiles, en todo caso sin tremendismo ni extorsión sentimental. Incluso la tortura, esa forma última en que la violencia se cumple en el horror de la inmovilidad y el aislamiento, no había sido mostrada con la dudosa minucia de tantos afiches y textos y películas que volvían a mi memoria también dudosa, también demasiado pronta a guardar imágenes y devolverlas para vaya a saber qué oscura complacencia. Pensé que si escribía el texto que me había pedido el escultor, si escribo el texto que me pedís, le dije, será un texto como esas piezas, jamás me dejaré llevar por la facilidad que demasiado abunda en ese terreno (I).¹

Although I had not read Cortázar's story when I began my project, it articulates, in precise terms, the response I first had, confronted with the novels and the films which are the subject of this thesis, novels and films which 'speak' too of acute pain. I should,

¹ 'Recortes de prensa', in *Queremos tanto a Glenda* (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1983; repr. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1996), pp. 65-82 (pp. 66-67). The Roman numeral given in brackets before the footnote number is a reference to my appendix of translations, which provides an English version of every Spanish-language quotation used in this thesis, in order of appearance.

therefore, like to take ‘Recortes de prensa’ as my ‘framing device’ or my lead-in, a guide and introduction in itself to the studies I propose. The three authors discussed in depth here – the Algerians Kateb Yacine and Assia Djebar, and the Argentinean Luisa Valenzuela – address the modality of inflicted suffering like the fictive sculptor, obliquely, couching allusions to unbroken torment in disjointed syntax, rendering direct aggression in indirect prose. The two directors whose works I examine – Gillo Pontecorvo, an Italian, and Luis Puenzo, an Argentine – suggest a host of horrors with the merest gesture towards anguish, the merest glimpse, to quote Cortázar again, ‘de cuerpos y [de] cabezas, de brazos y de manos’ (II).² All, in some measure, resist easy interpretation, defy any attempt to effect a simple summary: of structure, of character and even, on occasion, of plot. All, in some measure, demand that they be glossed in conjunction with less abstruse sources: with bald, historical, and even, on occasion, forthright accounts.

After inspecting the pieces in the studio for an instant, Noemí, writer-viewer in ‘Recortes’, gets out a clipping from the Spanish press. That clipping (which she insists the sculptor scans ‘aloud’) is an open letter from one Laura Beatriz Bonaparte Bruschtein, ‘domiciliada’, the latter tells us, ‘en Atoyac, número 26, distrito 10, Colonia Cuauhtémoc, México 5’ (p. 67, III). And whilst this initial assertion of identity seems also an avowal of subjectivity, whilst Laura Bruschtein is – we discover – related to the individuals whose demise she will detail, the letter nonetheless reads ‘in the style of an affidavit, [...] a [judicial] deposition’.³ To be more exact, it reads in the style of the ‘Urgent Action’ appeals issued by non-governmental organizations, by Amnesty International, by Americas and Human Rights Watch. Bruschtein’s missive proves, as Richard Wilson observes of such ‘legalistic’ documents, unflinchingly realist, ‘bluntly recount[ing] one fact after another in an unmitigated and relentless barrage of short case summaries’.⁴

Hecho: A las diez de la mañana del 24 de diciembre de 1975 fue secuestrada por personal del Ejército argentino (Batallón 601) en su puesto de trabajo [Aída Leonora Bruschtein Bonaparte] [...] *Hecho:* el 11 de junio de 1976, a las 12 de mediodía, llegan [al] departamento de [Santiago Bruschtein] [...] un grupo

² Ibid, p. 66. Further references to the Alfaguara edition are given after quotations in the text.

³ Aníbal González, “‘Press Clippings’ and Cortázar’s Ethics of Writing”, in *Julio Cortázar: New Readings*, ed. Carlos J. Alonso, Cambridge Studies in Latin American and Iberian Literature, 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 237-257 (p. 241).

⁴ ‘Representing Human Rights Violations: Social Contexts and Subjectivities’, in *Human Rights, Culture and Context: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Richard A. Wilson (London: Pluto Press, 1997), pp. 134-160 (p. 149).

de militares vestidos de civil. [...] Le obligaron a levantarse, y [...] lo subieron a un automóvil. [...] *Hecho*: El día 11 de marzo de 1977, a las 6 de la mañana, llegaron al departamento donde vivían [Irene Mónica Bruschtein Bonaparte de Ginzberg y su marido, Mario Ginzberg] fuerzas conjuntas del Ejército y la policía, llevándose a la pareja y dejando a sus hijitos: Victoria, de dos años y seis meses, y Hugo Roberto, de un año y seis meses, abandonados en la puerta del edificio (pp. 67-72, IV).

Nothing persists that might displace attention from the disappearance around which each *résumé* is configured; physical ‘lacunae’ are paralleled by the textual evacuation of tropes, metaphors and authorial voice.

For critics, and for the characters, this dispassionate report of abduction calls into question the efficacy of other less ‘literalist’ answers to abuses, casts doubt upon the adequacy of artistic protest where human life is under threat. ‘Todo esto no sirve de nada’ (p. 69, V), expostulates the sculptor, waving in the direction of his workshop. ‘Yo me paso meses haciendo estas mierdas, vos escribís libros, [...] casi llegamos a creer que las cosas están cambiando, y entonces te bastan dos minutos de lectura para comprender de nuevo la verdad’ (pp. 69-70, VI). ‘Perhaps’, writes Lois Parkinson Zamora, equating the ‘futility’ of aesthetic gestures (uneasily) with an absence of mimetic skill, ‘material objects can never represent, hence alleviate, the immateriality of physical pain. Perhaps art is hopelessly external to the internal pain it attempts to describe, and thus necessarily a trivialisation of that pain’.⁵ To her mind, as to that of Aníbal González, the extract from *Denuncia* signifies the ‘actual’, the neurologically ‘present’ – the privileged first term within an existential opposition that ‘Recortes’ constructs (and, I shall argue, eventually corrodes). It is an opposition underlined, they claim, by the introduction of a very different clipping, taken, purportedly, from *France-Soir*: an opposition that may be construed, according to González, not simply as real pain/ un-real pain, un-imaginable pain/ imagined pain but as ‘reality/ imagination’; an opposition apparent, indeed, in Cortázar’s epigraph to his story.⁶ ‘*Aunque no creo necesario decirlo,*’ states the novelist, ‘*el primer recorte es real y el segundo imaginario*’ (p. 65, VII).

What is in my opinion crucial, however, is not the philosophical precedence – or otherwise – of one quality over the other, but the order in which the issues of fact and fabrication, respectively, are raised. The *précis* of the circumstance foregoes every analysis

⁵ ‘Deciphering the Wounds: The Politics of Torture and Julio Cortázar’s Literature of Embodiment’, in *Literature and the Bible*, ed. David Bevan, Rodopi Perspectives on Modern Literature, 9 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 179-206 (p. 183).

⁶ “‘Press Clippings’ and Cortázar’s Ethics of Writing”, p. 240.

of the work the circumstance engendered; the diegesis of regional history foreshadows every scrutiny of the tableaux it inspired. Before Noemí can fully contemplate the intricacy of the limbs carved in the studio, she must remind herself and her companion of the limbs carved on the rack in 1970s Argentina, of the paltry excuses for corpses displayed to Bruschtein and Bruschtein's kin. Before Cortázar can allow his readers access to the phantasmagoria that is Noemí's commentary on a commentary on torture, he must remind us of the concrete atrocities which motivated 'Recortes': remind us of crimes which horrified outside the book, outside the canvas, of bodies mutilated off the plinth. 'De mi hija sólo me ofrecieron ver las manos cortadas y puestas en un frasco, que lleva el número 24' (p. 69, VIII), records the reproduced letter. 'Lo que quedaba de su cuerpo no podía ser entregado, porque era secreto militar' (ibid, IX).

Such attention to geopolitical setting is not unusual of course in texts about pain, about violence, about their status in a range of 'scripts'. To take an example from another genre, 'theory', Michel Foucault includes amongst the catalogue of objectives for his study of castigation these neatly worded aims:

1. Ne pas centrer l'étude des mécanismes punitifs sur leur seuls effets "répressifs", sur leur seul côté de "sanction", mais [...] prendre [...] la punition comme une fonction sociale complexe.
2. Analyser les méthodes punitives non point comme de simples conséquences de règles de droit ou comme des indicateurs de structures sociales; mais comme des techniques ayant leur spécificité dans le champ plus général des autres procédés de pouvoir.⁷

Surveiller et punir, consequently, draws a sharp distinction between punishment as inflicted under the *ancien régime*, and punishment as inflicted now. It does not trace an evolutionary curve of penal practices, an unfolding saga from the 'origins' of the rod. It constitutes instead a 'genealogy', as Foucault would say, elaborating contrapuntally upon different scenes of discipline, in politics where discipline played different roles. In feudal communes, amid slaves, the Frenchman tells us, corporal correctives predominated; for the body was the only property that might be seized, and physical integrity the sole asset there to strip. In pre- eighteenth-century Europe, executions were both public – dramatic exhibitions of the sovereign's might, the monarch's right – and immediately 'decipherable'. '[On expose le] cadavre du condamné sur les lieux de son crime, [...] on perce la langue des blasphémateurs, on brûle les impurs'.⁸ In the modern world, by

⁷ *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 31.

⁸ Ibid, p. 55.

contrast, methods of mortification appear insidious, the act of penance remarkably low-key. The psyche or the conscience of the malefactor, not his body, becomes the target for redress, and prison service is the corollary of a culture of surveillance – of amendment – embedded in civilian spheres.

A second, ‘theoretical’, case in point is that of Roselyne Rey, who embarks upon the investigation of anguish with the remark,

Faire une histoire de la douleur, [...] c’est s’atteler à un objet qui est [...] au croisement du biologique et du culturel ou du social. La douleur [...] n’a pas la même signification à toutes les époques et dans toutes les civilisations et, à l’intérieur même du cadre de la culture occidentale, la mémoire collective conserve le souvenir d’épisodes, de circonstances où les limites de l’endurance semblaient étrangement reculées, effacées: processions de flagellants du Moyen Age, soldats de Napoléon pendant la campagne de Russie qui repartaient à cheval après une amputation, [...] autant de témoignages ou d’exemples d’un rapport des hommes à la douleur modifié par les croyances, lié à des arrière-plans philosophiques et religieux divers.⁹

Her *Histoire de la douleur*, like *Surveiller*, eschews spurious continuities. Rey treats iconographies of discomfort as microtomies of discomfort, interpreting tracts on pain against as well as with each other; making nineteenth-century neuro-‘psychology’ a foil to contemporary brain ‘biology’. And her meticulous allusions to date and locale serve the same purpose as the line Cortázar gives his female narrator by way of preface to the Bruschtein clipping. ‘Pasó hace tres años como pudo pasar anoche o como puede estar pasando en este mismo momento en Buenos Aires o en Montevideo’ (p. 67, X), says Noemí. She does not say that it could happen thus in any place, does not say that it could happen thus on any day.

Yet strangely, the best-known anglophone academic treatise on torture – or at least, the best-known treatise on the impact and import of torture – dispenses with that caveat.¹⁰ Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* departs, rather, from the premise that brute force

⁹ *Histoire de la douleur* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1993; repr. Paris: Éditions la Découverte & Syros, 2000), p. 6.

¹⁰ I am referring, here, to work that attempts to ‘explain’ coercive interrogation *per se*, rather than works that offer a straightforward chronology of the practice. Two very thorough examples of the latter genre have appeared in English over the past twenty-five years. Malise Ruthven’s *Torture: The Grand Conspiracy*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978) focuses largely on the medieval and early modern period, detailing the Inquisitorial processes employed during the Albigensian Crusade and the purge of the Templars, as well as various European witch-hunts; it also covers British brutality in India. Edward Peters’ *Torture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985; expanded edn. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)

is 'international' not simply in its iniquity, nor in its incidence, but also in its structure and sequelae: its effect on the manner in which victims, even witnesses, may feel and tell their plight. Under the terms of her argument, the minimalist tone typical of many reports of violence (including Bruschtein's) is a reflection of the havoc wrought by suffering, as much as a proof of political acumen on the part of publisher and scribe. The occurrences documented in such texts have manifestly been '*universalized*', to cite anthropologist Wilson, though not as he defines the term, viz., 're-presented [...] in such a way that the event can be comprehended by readers on the other side of the globe'.¹¹ They have been 'universalized' because physical pain, for Scarry, unlike Rey, is *a priori* a uniquely and *a-culturally* 'obdurate sensation'; they have been 'shorn' of subjective meanings, pared down, because the encroachment of agony permits nothing more and nothing else.¹² The 'resistance' of corporeal distress to language, Scarry writes, 'is not one of its incidental or accidental attributes but is essential to what it is'. The incommunicability of the ache 'originates much less in the inflexibility of any one language or in the shyness of any one culture than in the utter rigidity of pain itself'.¹³

'Pain itself' is not the only element assumed to transverse time and place here, as one of *The Body in Pain*'s few critics, classicist Page DuBois, has pointed out. Whilst writers as diverse in their interests as Kate Millett, Maud Ellman and Judith Butler advance Scarry's work as somehow 'authoritative', DuBois demurs, '*The Body in Pain* is an important and powerful book. I differ from it in not believing in the ahistorical categories of creation, world, [and] civilization.'¹⁴ Those categories, to clarify, are the 'entities' which Scarry posits as being 'undone' in varying degrees by any adverse sensory reaction, unmade *in extremis* by any subjection to torture, to cold-bloodedly controlled harm. What is always most crucial to an individual in pain, at the moment of pain, she claims, is the simple

is a history of torture from the classical era until approximately 1967 (that is to say, the year in which martial law began in Greece), and devotes considerable space to the atrocities perpetrated by French servicemen at the time of the Algerian War. Between them, these texts have provided me with much of the background information necessary to this thesis.

¹¹ 'Representing Human Rights Violations', p. 139 (my emphasis).

¹² *Resisting Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 13.

¹³ *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 5.

¹⁴ *Torture and Truth* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 148, n. 4. See Millett, *The Politics of Cruelty: An Essay on the Literature of Political Imprisonment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 301, Ellman, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 85-86, p. 99, and Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 6, respectively.

presence of his agony (not, say, the ‘diagnosis’ of the symptoms, the probable implication of the throes). ‘Created [...] thought and feeling, the psychological and mental content that constitutes both [...] a self and [a] world’, accordingly, ‘ceases to exist’. Under torture, however, that content does not just vanish; it is dislocated from corporeal experience and appropriated by the state as insignia of its *own* self-perpetuating logic. When the suspect speaks, he speaks neither of himself, nor of his world. What he ‘betrays’, rather, is an indifference to the world that shores up his interrogator’s attempts to monopolize meaning, hog purpose. The ‘confessional’ structure serves not so much to elicit information as ‘visibly to deconstruct the prisoner’s voice’, and with it, every elaboration of political conditions which might rival that of the regime. Prolonged interrogation, Scarry adds, dramatizes, in graphic fashion, the ‘step-by-step backward movement along the path by which language comes into being and which is [...] being reversed’ by pain. To defend his body, the prisoner must grope for words that will attest not to his continuing hold on subjectivity, but to subjectivity’s impoverishment. One ‘answer’ alone can emerge from the scene of torment: ‘yes, all is almost gone now’. And one ‘answer’ alone, for Scarry, can be found to halt this scene: ‘it is misleading to focus on [the resistance evinced in] a particular country or continent at a given historical moment, since insofar as [torture and war] have a true opposite, it is “civilization” itself’.¹⁵

I have no quarrel with the hypothesis that during intense pain, consciousness may shrink to a point at which it is coterminous with the boundaries of the self; that during interrogation, one party’s loss of auto-awareness may be the other’s gain. But I would query the supposition that torture and war are, in Scarry’s phrase, ‘generic events’.¹⁶ It seems to me that the practice of torture is – following Foucault – *one* technique within the more general field of power relations, of power configurations, which a torturing society boasts. Under General Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile, for example, ‘a tactical decision [was] made by the military: that all women arrested for political reasons should be raped’.¹⁷ Violence in this context ‘imposed as well as presupposed [specifically] misogynistic inequalities’. Prisoners were selected for punishment by rape because they were women, but the rapists ‘also [strove] to imprint the gender identity of “feminine victim” on [these prisoners]’, impressing upon them the ‘facts’ of their ‘natural’

¹⁵ *The Body in Pain*, p. 30, p. 20, p. 35, p. 179.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 179.

¹⁷ Jacobo Timerman, *Chile: Death in the South*, trans. Robert Cox (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1987), p. 30.

vulnerability, their ‘natural’ passivity, their ‘natural’ subalternity to man; ‘facts’ that pertained outside the torture chamber, as within it.¹⁸

It is, having said that, not so much the sexual, racial or religious overtone imputed to torture by the torturer that concerns this thesis, as the influence the imputation has upon the tortured. ‘C’est moins’, to quote Roselyne Rey, ‘le changement du sens qu’une société donne à la douleur qui importe ici, que les conséquences de cette transformation sur l’expérience individuelle de la douleur’. Indeed, the question I started the study to explore, contra Scarry, the question that led me to adopt a culturally comparative framework, is in a sense Rey’s question too: ‘les différentes significations attribuées à la douleur [...] modifient[-elles] la perception que le sujet en a?’¹⁹ Cortázar’s sculptor has one reply, a reply that he gives Noemí, fellow-Argentinean and fellow-exile, when she says, ‘I’ll never let myself be carried away’. ‘— Eso es cosa tuya, [...] — me dijo—. Yo sé que no es fácil, llevamos tanta sangre en los recuerdos que a veces uno se siente culpable de ponerle límites, de manearlo para que no nos inunde del todo’ (p. 67, XI). Collective memory – *their* collective memory – is permeated by blood in ways that the second person plural differentiates in ‘Recortes’ from mine, from ours. Collective experience dictates that the ‘self’ the interrogator un-makes, the ‘self-image’ the artist re-makes, has already been bound up in, threatened by, the thralls of force. I have tried here to respect the particularity of that experience, to put the historical document, as Noemí does, first.

¹⁸ Sharon Marcus, ‘Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention’ in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 385-403 (p. 391). In other contexts, men as well as women have been forcibly penetrated, and thereby branded ‘female’. Inside the detention centres of ‘Dirty War’ Argentina, the ‘phallic-like’ electric cattle prod was applied, as the electrode had been in Algeria, ‘as a matter of preference (or [...] of policy) to the genitals, anus, breasts, and mouth’. (Frank Graziano, *Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality and Radical Christianity in the Argentine ‘Dirty War’* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), p. 38.) French torturers in Indochina resorted, infamously, to anal rape by bottle; their counterparts in Algeria attempted to ‘effeminate’ detainees by obliging them ‘d’avoir entre eux des rapports homosexuels’. (Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *La Torture dans la République: Essai d’histoire et de politique contemporaines (1954-1962)* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972), p. 32.) Even ostensibly ‘non-sexual’ techniques such as water torture can, as one victim indicates, acquire gendered connotations, contorting male bodies into an overtly womanish pose. ‘J’ai été frigorifier [*sic*], tuyaut dans la bouche, que la femme il est enceinte dans 9 mois, moi j’ai été enceinte dans 9 secondes et non pas 9 minutes’. (Abdelaziz Boupacha, ‘Récit d’Abdelaziz Boupacha’ in Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 224-227 (p. 225).)

¹⁹ *Histoire de la douleur*, p. 6.

SECOND CLIPPING (*FRANCE-SOIR*)

When Noemí has taken leave of the sculptor, agreeing to compose the text he requested, she goes out into the street. Before she reaches the taxi rank, a sudden impulse prompts her to stray a little from her route, and she stumbles across the figure of a small girl, wracked by sobs. ‘¿— Qué te pasa?’ (p. 76, XII) the writer asks. ‘—Mi mamá’, hiccups the child, tugging at her coat sleeve, leading her through labyrinthine alleys, towards a battered zinc-roofed shack. As Noemí approaches the shack, she smells the acrid odour of flesh alight, hears a muffled voice rising and falling in pain. Inside, a woman has been stripped and stretched across a bedstead, tied to the posts with knotted towels. Nearby, a man sits smoking a cigarette, stubbing it against her breast at intervals, branding her torso between puffs. Scandalized by this scene of domestic abuse, Noemí picks up a stool and knocks the man unconscious. She frees the woman, then helps her tether up her husband. Silently, the pair begin to torment him in turn; subject him, we conjecture, ‘to exactly the sort of atrocities which [Noemí] and her sculptor friend had read about and condemned in the [first] press cuttings of the title’.²⁰

As the minutes pass, Noemí’s vision – and hence version – of events gets blurry, and her own encounter appears interspersed with fragments of the episodes denounced in Bruschtein’s letter, interfused with impressions of burning embers, of orphans and of hands:

Pedazos de imágenes volviendo desde un recorte de diario, las manos cortadas [...] y puestas en un frasco que lleva el número 24, [...] la toalla en la boca, los cigarrillos encendidos, y Victoria, de dos años y seis meses, y Hugo Roberto, de un año y seis meses, abandonados en la puerta del edificio. Cómo saber cuánto duró, cómo entender que también yo, también yo aunque me creyera del buen lado también yo, cómo aceptar que también yo ahí del otro lado de manos cortadas y de fosas comunes, también yo del otro lado de las muchachas torturadas y fusiladas esa misma noche de Navidad... (p. 79, XIII).

Afterwards, she returns to her flat, where she anaesthetizes herself with vodka, and passes out. The next day, she scribbles an account of the night’s occurrences, which she reads down the telephone to the sculptor. This will be the by-line for his pieces; these

²⁰ Dominic Moran, *Questions of the Liminal in the Fiction of Julio Cortázar* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), p. 118.

odd anecdotes serve as captions for his effigies of pain. At the time, he is puzzled. Later, he sends her the second of the two clippings, a *fait divers* from *France-Soir*. In some shanty suburb, it seems, police have uncovered evidence of a cruel and brutal crime: the naked body of a man, strapped to his bed, tortured to death.

The latter half of 'Recortes', then, raises the theme of authorial commitment – and of an author's possible responses to abuse – in a far more disturbing manner than the earlier passage, the dialogue between Noemí and her friend. Facing 'actual' brutality, the narrator abandons every notion of indirect or discursive intervention; 'facing violence, the narrator is forced to act, and yet, by acting, she falls herself into the nightmare of violence'.²¹ Cortázar's writer, González goes so far as to say, has become writer-accomplice, an accomplice 'of the torturers, the criminals. [...] The writer's craft is [shown to be] a sublimated version of the mechanisms of aggression used by those in power and those who wish to have power'.²² And since Noemí is not solely a writer, but also a reader, that movement of the story towards 'wish-fulfilment' which problematizes her position vis-à-vis the subject of brutality may be deemed to problematize our position, too. The phrase that once expressed her approbation of the sculptor's oeuvre and conduct (none of the 'doubtful trifle of so many posters and texts and movies') finds a ghastly echo in the words that now articulate opprobrium for the crassness of her own. The terms that once evoked respect for his depiction of torture return, here, to discomfit and unsettle all who watch, or read, or hear. 'Lo que vino después pude haberlo visto en una película o leído en un libro' (p. 77, p. XIV).

Laura E. Tanner, elaborating on the mechanisms of identification and dissociation at work in the aesthetic experience 'of cruelty, comments:

The mimetic qualities of fiction function through a series of complex mediations involving not only the gap between sign and referent but that between the text and an empirical subtext drawn from the reader's assumptions about violence – an understanding of its impact, dynamics, and consequences drawn from experience in the empirical world as well as from fictional and nonfictional representations.

Although literary language is never 'simply referential', she continues, 'the act of reading a representation of violence is defined by the reader's suspension between the semiotic and the real, between a representation and the material dynamics of violence which it

²¹ Jaime Alazraki, 'From *Bestiary* to *Glenda*: Pushing the Short Story to Its Limits', in *Critical Essays on Julio Cortázar* (London: G. K. Hall, 1999), ed. Alazraki, pp. 133-140 (p. 140).

²² "Press Clippings" and Cortázar's Ethics of Writing', p. 250.

evokes, reflects, or transforms'.²³ 'Recortes de prensa' stresses the fine line Tanner calls 'suspension' the better, arguably, to snap it, thrusting Noemí out of a world in which the literary (that which is read, envisioned) may comfortably be distinguished from the palpable (that which is touched) into an environment where the two converge. Once away from the sculptor's studio, the conceptions of villainy that she brought to and drew from reading come to condition her relationship to real men and women. She remembers King Clovis, raging at the story of the crucifixion, '¡Ah, si yo hubiera estado ahí con mis francos!' (p. 71, XV) and – ostensibly – realizes that desire for revenge. She recalls Jack London's allusions to Nordic tortures, and – ostensibly – carries out the ritual, the ceremonial dismemberment he describes.

Cortázar, however, stalls her drive to identification with these figures in unexpected ways. Between the reading subject and the murdering subject, between the 'representation' and the 'materiality' of violence, there is, in 'Recortes', a kind of smokescreen, a hazy divider or a film. 'Yo estaba ahí como sin estar' (p. 77, XVI), Noemí observes; and her comment is our first clue that this narrative is macabre in an occult sense, as well as graphic. The tale of art and atrocity, it transpires, is also a tale of the paranormal, of displacement in time, in space: a ghost story, for want of better terms. The events recounted in *France-Soir* are events that took place in Marseilles. The events recounted by Noemí are events that took place, she believes, in the French capital, in Paris where both she and the sculptor have lived for many years. When she examines the clipping, the photographs that illustrate it are indeed pictures of the shack where the woman, then the man, had lain suffering before her. But the alleys and the courtyards she passed through behind the child no longer border on the *quartier* that she visited. 'Aunque caminé mirando cada casa y crucé la acera opuesta como recordaba haberlo hecho, no reconocí ningún portal que se pareciera al de esa noche, la luz caía sobre las cosas como una infinita máscara, [...] ningún acceso a un huerto interior' (p. 81, XVII).

It is not clear, at any stage, whether Noemí or the *marseillais* family 'are' the phantoms. On the one hand, 'Recortes's uncanny twist could be said to mark the alienation of the viewer, the spectator from the spectacle of horror, figuring a distance that Laura Tanner, likewise, tropes with reference to incorporeity, to ephemera, to shades. The reader, she notes, must leave flesh behind 'in order to enter imaginatively into the scene of violence', must be (*estar*) there without being (*sin estar*). He or she 'approaches the novel [...] not as

²³ *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 6-7.

a body without consciousness but as a consciousness without body', a 'disembodiment' that contrasts pointedly, for 'Tanner, with 'the *experience* of violence' – experience 'defined', she contends, 'by the increasingly urgent and overwhelming presence of the body'.²⁴ One might, equally, argue that the enterprise of writing, not of reading, about physical anguish could be the issue in this fiction; for that enterprise shares the ambivalence, the 'absent-presence' (so to speak) of the spectral apparition, the contrary indicators of prosopopoeia and void. 'The body', claims Peter Brooks, 'is at once the distinct other of the signifying project – which, as an exercise of mind and will on the world, takes a stand outside materiality – and in some sense its vehicle (this living hand that writes)'. Or, similarly, 'representation of the body in signs endeavors to make the body present, but always within the context of its absence, since use of the linguistic sign implies the absence of the thing for which it stands'.²⁵

More than anything, perhaps, Noemí's venture into 'supernatural' spaces may reflect other psychic divagations, other sorties from the here and now. 'Spectrality', asserts Fredric Jameson, 'is not difficult to circumscribe, as what makes the present waver: like the vibrations of a heat wave through which the massiveness of the object world – indeed of matter itself – now shimmers like a mirage'.²⁶ His description is as apt for what we commonly name trauma, as it is for ghostly visions, as apposite for after-shock as it is for after-'life'. The symptoms of post-traumatic disorder, after all, can 'make the present waver': flashbacks and re-enactments reverberate through time, dissipating reality, and dissolving the contours of the world around the person. With this in mind, I have, cautiously, used metaphors of haunting to 'thread' this thesis together, used images of ghostly activity, like Cortázar, to link atrocity in one place to 'twin' terrors, to eerie echoes somewhere else. And I have done so not merely to shield the reader (and, in the interests of psychological self-defence, the writer) from too close an identification with the subject in pain, but to put paid to the intimation that the ordeal of torture is ever – entirely – over or done.

Chapter One begins by introducing the Derridean notion of 'hauntology', then adopts that notion as a platform for exploring the travails of the 1950s Algerian War, and with them, the work of the Maghreb's most famous author, the one-time detainee and

²⁴ *Intimate Violence*, p. 9, p. 37.

²⁵ *Body Works: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (London: Harvard University Press, p. 1, pp. 7-8.

²⁶ 'Marx's Purloined Letter', in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 26-67 (p. 38).

dissident Kateb Yacine. In Chapter Two, the evanescent nature of the spectre becomes the guiding theme in my analysis of a ‘docudramatic’ film on the same war – a film which shocked Western audiences by candidly depicting torture: the Italian-Algerian co-production, *La Bataille d’Alger*.²⁷ I push this theme forward in Chapter Three, interpreting two texts by Assia Djebar with reference to the intermittent apparition of the ‘undead’ in tradition, to the sudden entrance and the exit from a sub-, an ‘other’ world. Chapter Four turns to Argentina, to the often distressing writing of Luisa Valenzuela, an exile during the so-called ‘Dirty War’, a self-confessed advocate of most things weird and feared, including witches. Finally, in Chapter Five, I look at a second film that approaches political ‘disappearance’ and ‘reappearance’ from a pseudo-realist slant, Luis Puenzo’s *La historia oficial*. In each of these chapters, history (as I said earlier) forgoes the rest; in the last chapter, it comes after, too. The trajectory of the thesis thus follows that of ‘Recortes’, whose (anti) heroine ends her tour of Paris finding a trace of actual violence, a closing proof ‘in’ flesh and blood. ‘La nena sí estaba’ (p. 81, XVIII), we are told; though the paths Noemí trod at night are not there, little girl still was.

²⁷ Derek Malcolm asserts that the torture scenes were, in fact, initially ‘cut from versions distributed in Britain and America’; I have, however, found no evidence to support his claim. (‘Without Prejudice’, *The Guardian*, 20 July 2000, p. 11.)

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KATEB YACINE *OR* THE SPECTRES OF A PAST TO COME

Ontology speaks only of what is present or what is absent; it cannot conceive of what is neither. Thus it is replaced by a 'hauntology' adequate to the task of interrogating the spirit, that which is neither living nor dead. The linear time of birth, life and death, of the beginning and the end, has no place in the hauntic, which latter alone allows us to speak of what persists beyond the end, beyond death...

Warren Montag, 'Spirits Armed and Unarmed: Derrida's *Specters of Marx*'

If 'ontology' embraces the issues, and the categories, of being and non-being, what would one call a science that eschewed them, that sought to determine neither the essence, nor the nature, nor the structure, of 'things'? In the 1994 work, *Spectres de Marx*, Jacques Derrida gives us his answer: *hantologie*. The neologism is not an off-hand pun. It is, on the contrary, the first entry in a new philosophical lexicon, the opening salvo in a campaign for the study of ghosts, the study of '[l']après la fin de l'histoire'.²⁸ Or more precisely, the study of that which *returns*, which disturbs the very notion of a foundational moment, and of a closing one, by re-enacting both; whose appearance is also the mark of disappearance. There can be no 'classification' of the spectre, for phantoms reside uniquely on the boundaries between life and death, between thing-ness and nothing-ness. There can be no 'genealogy' of the spectre, even in the Foucauldian sense – no description of its evolution as a body of 'knowledge', even without reference to some (geno) type that transcends '[le] champ d'événements' or that runs 'dans son identité

²⁸ *Spectres de Marx: L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993), p. 32. Where necessary, and for the sake of clarification, I have also drawn on Peggy Kamuf's translation, *Specters of Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994).

vide, tout au long de l'histoire' – for phantoms represent, precisely, the point at which 'knowledge' stops short.²⁹

The spectre, indeed, un-picks every opposition that Foucault constructs between genealogy and (conventional) history. It is not a constant, to be tracked across different stages and different ages, nor yet a product of the epoch which it 'sees' and enters. It intervenes in a specific field of events, but owes them neither form nor (non-) existence. And Derrida's exercise[s] in 'hauntology', his *Spectres de Marx*, likewise, erode the distinctions between the singularity and the plurality of 'out-of-body' experience, between a particular manifestation of the 'paranormal' – *das Gespenst des Kommunismus* summoned by Marx and Engels, say – and all its shades and repetitions: the 'scarlet' ghosts which haunted Kojève, Fukuyama, Paul Valéry. 'On ne peut parler de *générations* [...] d'esprits', Derrida writes. But speak of them he does, albeit with a strict proviso: that the 'lines' of parentage which carry us from one 'spirit' to the next ('*Kant qui genuit Hegel qui genuit Marx*') must always be read as specious, conning, as signs *in* space for referents more or less outside it. 'Comment *comprendre* [...] le discours de la fin ou le discours sur la fin?' he asks, rhetorically.³⁰ But 'comprehend' this discourse he does, discerning and delimiting a certain post-war language 'of the end', at least – or rather, of 'the end of the end' – just as Foucault, in an earlier time, traced out the scheme of different semes, of 'punishment' and 'reason'.

Spectres, in other words, engages both with genealogy and genealogy's excess, with the synchronic and the diachronic, with a philosophy of 'discontinuity' that severs subjects from their forebears, and a philosophy of 'continuity' that shears lore, instead, from place, from context. It is, to quote Derrida himself, 'a book about what "inherit" can, not mean [*vouloir-dire*] in an *unequivocal* way, but, perhaps, enjoin, in a way that is contradictory and contradictorily-binding'. This chapter constitutes my own, preliminary, response to that enjoinder, to the urging of a 'heritage [which] hands us down' conflictive 'orders'.³¹ 'Das Gespenst [das um] geht', here, however, is not that of Communism, but colonialism; and the 'red thread' binding past to present, not the line of Derrida's Marxist 'descent', but a trail of blood he has elsewhere evoked as Algerian and as *émigré*, as well as

²⁹ Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, 'Entretien avec Michel Foucault', in Foucault, *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988*, ed. Daniel Defertet and François Ewald, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), III: 1976-1979, pp. 140-160 (p. 147).

³⁰ *Spectres*, p. 30, p. 31.

³¹ 'Marx and Sons', trans. G. M. Goshgarian, in Sprinker, pp. 213-269 (p. 219).

thinker. A trail of blood, it should be stressed, which is more than a metaphor for genesis (*'Kant qui genuit Hegel'*): what interests me is the return or 'revenance' of *violence* within the frame of Empire, the almost-always-armed incursion of the French onto 'their' Maghrebine domain. 'Au fond', the author of *Spectres de Marx* observes, 'une de mes premières et plus imposantes figures de la spectralité, la spectralité elle-même, je me demande si ce ne fut pas la France, je veux dire tout ce qui portait ce nom' – 'de meurtrières persécutions, [...] de[s] pogroms'.³²

In the first instance, I have taken him, for better or worse, 'at his word', taken the 'figures of spectrality' as a (tremulous) basis for the analysis of France's activity in Algeria and of its representation; taken 'hauntology' as the model for an account of the Franco-Maghreb which might be and not be genealogical. The story of the War of Independence, as I sketch it, is a story of one specific 'apparition' – the apparition of torture in the years 1954-1963 – and of a string of others, too, of atrocities perpetrated in the 1840s, in the 1940s, in the 1980s. It is a story in which the certainties of the ontologic – the 'facts' of repression, the presence of the living, the absence of the dead – are constantly undermined by the uncertainties of the 'hauntic', of corpses without cemeteries, and martyrs without scars: in which 'phenomenality', in Derrida's phrase, remains 'surnaturelle et paradoxale'.³³ Yet the name I have chosen to 'haunt' this story, to link disparate dates, as Marx's name, in *Spectres*, links disparate texts, is not that of Jacques Derrida but Kateb Yacine. Kateb Yacine, who was tortured as a student, then excluded from his school, and later from his homeland. Kateb Yacine, who renounced French in the 1970s and returned to Algeria to stage dialect plays, only to find himself ostracized again, exiled by the arabophone authorities as he had been by their francophone predecessors. Kateb Yacine, who has been acclaimed as the 'founder' of a generation of North African writers, whose only novel, *Nedjma*, has been lauded '[comme] l'œuvre de référence majeure de la littérature algérienne'.³⁴

Whilst the section 'Towards a hauntology of Algeria' deals predominantly with historical narratives, albeit in eidolic guise, the remainder of the chapter blurs the margins of what Derrida would call 'traditional scholarship' still further, obfuscating the distinction, as he has it,

³² *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre; ou la prothèse d'origine*, (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), p. 73, p. 37.

³³ *Spectres*, p. 27.

³⁴ Charles Bonn, *Kateb Yacine, Nedjma*, Études littéraires, 26 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), p. 112.

Entre le réel et le non-réel, l'effectif et le non-effectif, le vivant et le non-vivant, l'être et le non-être, [...] l'opposition entre ce qui est présent et ce qui ne l'est pas, [...] au-delà de [laquelle], il n'y a pour le *scholar* que l'hypothèse d'école, fiction théâtrale, littérature et spéculation.³⁵

I undertake a reading of *Nedjma* as at once a 'timely' and 'un-timely' vision of colonial relations: as an image of pre-war oppression that casts shadows of itself through other years, and over other settings. The biographical and the non-fictional, it is true, do feature in this textual critique. The rationale behind their inclusion, however, is not 'scholarly'. The point is not, to quote Robert Young on Freud, 'whether the event[s] [described] "really" happened' – and thus, whether we are offered a 'good', a faithful 'copy' of some actuality – or whether they were 'subsequently fantasized by the experiencing [/narrating] subject'; whether the novel comprises, in Plato's terms, 'bad copy', viz *phantasma*. What counts, rather, is that these events are repeated as 'disruptive event[s] that fissure ordinary forms of psychic continuity', of 'knowing' thought.³⁶

What counts, to change vocabulary, is the *après-coup*: the unpunctual, unpredictable *effect* '[de] ce qui [...] *n'a pas pu pleinement s'intégrer dans un contexte significatif*'.³⁷ 'Dans un contexte significatif' which may be taken as synonymous with 'seamless' self-perception, with a conscious cognizance of mishaps, not visited as flashbacks, and not re-lived as traumas. 'Dans un contexte significatif' which may, equally, be deemed the realm of binaries, of contrasts, where meaning emerges from antitheses between two jarring state[ment]s, and sense precludes the 'both', the 'either' – the disincarnate/ incarnate, animate/ inanimate. And, finally, 'dans un contexte significatif' which is the home of Empire's own (putative) 'intelligibility'; of 'truths' conveyed; 'un contexte' un-disturbed by slippages between Western and non-Western signification, between enunciation and enunciation's 'address'. The ghost, notes Agamben, is an 'unstable signifier'.³⁸ In the colonial sphere, notes Derrida, every signifier is 'ghostly', and every utterance susceptible to drift away from its intended import. The European would insist upon the clarity of 'his' language, the self-evidence of the 'fact' pronounced aloud: 'le *phénomène* de s'entendre-parler pour vouloir

³⁵ *Spectres*, p. 33.

³⁶ *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 83.

³⁷ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1967; repr. Paris: Quadrige, 1998), p. 34 (my emphasis).

³⁸ *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron, (London: Verso, 1993), p. 82.

dire. Mais il faut dire le *phénomène* comme *phantasme* [...] [et] *phantasma*, c'est aussi le fantôme, le double. [...] Nous y sommes'.³⁹

TOWARDS A 'HAUNTOLOGY' OF ALGERIA

'L'horreur', observed the Algerian novelist Mohammed Dib in 1962, 'ignore l'approfondissement; elle ne connaît que la répétition'. After Auschwitz came Hiroshima, after Hiroshima, Indochina and Algeria. When the fight to sustain colonialism began to sweep across the French Empire, 'les exterminations de la dernière guerre n' [avaient] pas fini de hanter les nuits des hommes'.⁴⁰ For Dib, writing in the shadow of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb, the ordeals of his own country seemed predestined to occupy a footnote in the increasingly meaningless history of twentieth-century atrocity. Horror itself had become mundane:

Inimaginable en cette seconde, [...] [l'horreur] ne sera qu'une péripétie banale tout à l'heure, une fois [...] accomplie [...] Un peu de sang répandu, un peu de chair broyée, un peu de sueur: il n'existe pas de spectacle plus désespérément terne.⁴¹

Yet if the brutalities perpetrated in Algeria still 'pale', as Dib suspected, before the phantoms of their predecessors, they also granted those phantoms an after- afterlife. Perhaps, indeed, the war that lasted from 1954 to 1962 was always, in some measure, a spectral conflict: a conflict that 'began', as Derrida says of the *revenant*, 'by coming back [*par revenir*]'.⁴² It undoubtedly derived much impetus from the memory of recent ignominies: for the Algerian nationalists, the wide-scale massacres that followed Muslim rioting at Sétif in 1945; for the French army, defeat by the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu and the subsequent withdrawal from Indochina.

To the eyes of many, however, what made its re-appearance during the Algerian War was precisely that spirit which the international community had sought to exorcise after World War Two. The systematic abuse of human rights in Algeria was the first post-war

³⁹ *Monolinguisme*, p. 48.

⁴⁰ 'Postface' to *Qui se souvient de la mer*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962), p. 189, p. 190.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 189.

⁴² *Spectres*, p. 32.

instance of its kind to capture the attention of a global audience. In France, where the police struggled to control the activities of a large immigrant population, similar abuse gave bodily contours to the fear of a recurring past. Thousands of Algerian ‘suspects’ were rounded up and crowded into detention centres around the Parisian region: at ‘Vel d’Hiv’, which had seen the incarceration, before them, of thirteen thousand Jews; at the Japy gymnasium, where four thousand Jews had, likewise, awaited deportation. In 1961, Maurice Papon, then chief of police, requisitioned R.A.T.P. buses and their drivers to assist in the transportation of Algerian detainees, so numerous were the arrests. It was the first time, notes Jean-Luc Einaudi, ‘que des bus parisiens avec leurs machinistes [avaient] été réquisitionnés, [...] [depuis] 1942’.⁴³

Torture, that ‘cancer’, in Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s phrase, ‘of democracy’, also returned to French soil. From 1957 onwards, complaints multiplied that the electrode and the *tuyau* were proving common fixtures in the interrogation of nationalist sympathisers across the country. Yet the cancer which took hold in France was a secondary one, spread, as Vidal-Naquet points out, by ‘policiers rapatriés d’Afrique du Nord’.⁴⁴ Reports of abuse in Lyons and in Paris were simply echoes of the torrent that had long been pouring from Algeria. As early as 1955, a government study favourable to the use of *procédés spéciaux* concluded, despite itself, that certain police methods current in the North African *département* ‘had the character of true tortures’.⁴⁵ For the army, remarked the pro-military journalist Bernard Fall, these methods were merely one more weapon in its arsenal, ‘the particular bane of the terrorist, just as antiaircraft artillery is that of the airman or machine-gun fire that of the foot soldier’.⁴⁶

The use of torture as an interrogatory and punitive measure against Algerian Muslims

⁴³ *La Bataille de Paris, 17 octobre 1961*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), p. 113. Maurice Papon, later to become a minister under Giscard d’Estaing, was, in 1998, convicted of ‘crimes against humanity’ for his part in the deportation of French Jews during World War Two.

⁴⁴ *La Torture*, p. 111. This text was originally published in English, under the title *Torture: Cancer of Democracy*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).

⁴⁵ Guillaume Report, quoted in Rita Maran, *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War*, (New York: Praeger, 1989), p. 48. In 1999, following the release of (pre-war) documents from the French army’s archives, an article in *Le Monde* claimed that the authorities had, indeed, been aware of the use of torture in Algeria from 1949 onwards. (Jacques Isnard, ‘Dès 1949, des mises en garde contre l’usage de la torture’, *Le Monde*, 5 February 1999, p. 9.)

⁴⁶ ‘A Portrait of the Centurion’, in Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, trans. Daniel Lee (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), pp. vii-xviii (p. xv).

was, effectively, institutionalized. It was also unregulated. Testimonies abound as to the vindictive, often arbitrary, fashion in which police officers and soldiers might select their victims. One unit, recalls a former French paratrooper, amused itself by rounding up the better-dressed Muslims in the district: ‘what sport! Particularly for those who, as civilians, had never worn such well-cut clothes. [...] Too bad for any suspect arrested wearing a tie and polished shoes’.⁴⁷ Such, moreover, was the scale of the practice that Vidal-Naquet, in a recent interview, asserted, ‘sur l’ensemble de l’Algérie, si l’on parle de plusieurs centaines de milliers, on reste en deça de la vérité. Un million de torturés? Probablement’.⁴⁸ At least 3,024 individuals are known to have ‘disappeared’ from the city of Algiers between 1956 and 1957; more than 108,000 others passed through Constantine’s notorious ‘ferme Améziane’ between 1957 and 1961.⁴⁹ What had seemed ‘impossible’ to many veterans of the French Resistance – ‘that one day men should be made to scream by those acting in [their] name’ – came indisputably, in Algeria, to pass.⁵⁰

Under the circumstances, however, ‘impossibility’ was a relative term. One revelation to emerge from the Algerian War was, indeed, that France remained possessed by the *hantise* of Vichy – and could mark that *hantise* on Muslim flesh. For every Frenchman to invoke the shadow of the Gestapo, another might rail against “l’esprit d’abandon”, le même qui a conduit à ne pas continuer la lutte en 1940’.⁵¹ Yet Algerian nationalism had an inheritance of its own, and the country was inhabited by ghosts more ancient than those which had walked since World War Two: ghosts of the thousands of Muslims left to perish, screaming, in the name of European expansion and imperialism. France’s presence in its Maghrebien *département* had proved, from the outset, to be a bloody one.

⁴⁷ Pierre Leuilliet, *St Michael and the Dragon: A Paratrooper in the Algerian War*, trans. Tony White, (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 234. This is an abridged version of the original French text, published under the title *Saint Michel et le dragon* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1961), and subsequently seized and pulped on the orders of the Ministry of the Interior.

⁴⁸ ‘La torture: les points de vue de Raoul Girardet et de Pierre Vidal-Naquet, recueillis par Daniel Bermond’, in *L’Algérie des Français*, ed. Charles-Robert Ageron, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993), pp. 267-273 (pp. 269-70).

⁴⁹ Declaration made by Paul Teitgen, then secretary general to the Algiers police force, and quoted in Vidal-Naquet, *La Torture*, p. 52; Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La Ferme Améziane: Enquête sur un centre de torture pendant la guerre d’Algérie*, (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1991), p. 72.

⁵⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, introduction to Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. John Calder, (London: John Calder, 1958), p. 3. Sartre’s essay was omitted from the edition of *La Question* that would later appear in France (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1961).

⁵¹ Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), p. 94.

Less than two decades of occupation sufficed to transform ‘l’une des premières [armées] de l’Europe [...] en une immense armée de razzieurs, n’ayant en vue, le plus souvent, que [...] les expéditions de terreur’, and French officers quickly became notorious for their participation in 1842’s murderous *affaire des grottes*.⁵² A pattern of collective repression that would last for the next one hundred and twenty years had been set.

What gave ancestral scandals a particular resonance at the time of the Algerian War was, moreover, not so much that they had been *déjà vu*, as that they had *not* been seen. After the widely reported ‘cave affair’, in which several hundred Arabs had been asphyxiated by smoke, army officials took pains to cover the tracks of conquest:

Barely two months later, Saint-Arnaud suffocated fifteen hundred Moslems in another cave, carefully left no survivors to tell the story, and in a confidential message reported to Bugeaud: ‘No one went into the cave; not a soul ... but myself.’ Following Bugeaud’s advice, the Government agreed that French newspapers should not have access to ‘too precise details, evidently easy to justify, but concerning which there is no advantage in informing a European public’.⁵³

It was the first of many occasions on which metropolitan France was to find its gaze forcibly averted from the kind of conflict being waged in Algeria – and the precedent did not end there. The twentieth-century officer could prove as assiduous as Saint-Arnaud in his attempts to efface every testament to brutality from the field of vision, or debate. Terrorist suspects routinely vanished in detention; where they survived the fact of torture might be difficult to substantiate, ‘owing to the lack of physical traces left by the [...] methods of water and electricity’.⁵⁴ Any publication to contain an overly detailed account of army intelligence work was liable to seizure by the authorities. The Algerian War, never declared, came to haunt French consciousness much as the spectre of nineteenth

⁵² Mostefa Lacheraf, *L’Algérie: nation et société*, Cahiers libres 71-2, (Paris: François Maspero, 1969), p. 94.

⁵³ Edward Behr, *The Algerian Problem*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961), p. 22. Bugeaud was head of the French army charged with ‘pacifying’ indigenous resistance in Algeria between 1841 and 1847, Saint-Arnaud an officer in that army, and later Marshal of France.

⁵⁴ Guillaume Report, quoted in Maran, p. 47. Although coercive interrogation was often, as I here imply, a precursor to ‘disappearance’, this was not invariably the case. Repressive practice, to cite Bernard Droz and Evelyne Lever, took many other forms, ‘qu’il s’agisse de l’exécution “pour l’exemple” de fuyards ou de simples suspects, de l’achèvement des blessés, des prisonniers discrètement abattus au détour d’un chemin (la “corvée de bois”) ou carrément largués dans le vide par avion’. In the context of such abuse, they suggest, ‘la torture fut à la fois un cas extrême et une pratique courante’ (*Histoire de la guerre d’Algérie (1954-1962)*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), pp. 139-140).

century ‘pacification’ had done, its disembodied Muslim victims flickering uncertainly before an audience of ignorants and sceptics. Only when it emerged that European ‘loyalists’ had also been abused did many newspapers choose to ‘supprimer les guillemets dont ils entouraient le mot torture’.⁵⁵

This loss of quotation marks nonetheless fell far short of guaranteeing ‘direct speech’ to – or of – the tortured. Even after Algerian independence, the subject of war crime was to figure, in both nations, largely as an absence. Successive amnesties ensured that the activities of French officers were spared judicial scrutiny, and a 1979 law closed all police archives ‘mettant en cause la vie privée, ou intéressant la sûreté de l’Etat, ou la Défense nationale’.⁵⁶ It became impossible, as the historian Benjamin Stora observed, ‘de toucher, d’approcher la guerre d’Algérie’.⁵⁷ The bloody *particulars* of France’s military operation were no longer eligible for either research or redress; any endeavour to ‘ontologize’ the phantoms of colonial atrocity, ‘à les rendre présents, [...] à *identifier* les dépouilles et à *localiser* les morts’, had, effectively, been forestalled.⁵⁸ Inside Algeria, other blinds were drawn over the face of suffering. As Boumediene’s government rewrote history to exclude its opponents, the mantra, ‘un seul héros, le peuple’, was to drown out the names of many of those whose lives had been blighted by torture. Where the ghost of individual abuse failed to dissolve in the cold light of the new, ‘revolutionary’, day, it was ritually, and emphatically, laid to rest. Acknowledgement proved to be indissociable from epitaph: in the military narrative of sacrifice and struggle, ‘les morts, seuls, avaient droit de cité’.⁵⁹

Assuming the atrocities of war, for the regime, meant not only ‘localizing’ the victim but also interring him, making certain, as Derrida comments, ‘que, dans ce qui reste de

⁵⁵ Vidal-Naquet, *La Torture*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Law 79-18, passed on the January 3rd, 1979, and quoted in Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l’oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie*, (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1991), p. 271. In a communiqué dated April 13th, 2001, France’s prime minister, Lionel Jospin, insisted that access be ‘facilitated’ to certain archives relating to the Algerian War. He did not, however, suggest that the content of these archives should enter fully into the public domain: documents were, rather to be released ‘à titre individuel’, ‘[aux] personnes appartenant à la communauté scientifique ou universitaire’. Crucially, moreover, the communiqué made no mention of police (as opposed to army) records, and reiterated the terms of the 1979 law; it has been sharply criticized by both Stora and Jean-Luc Einaudi. (Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, ‘Des archives pas si ouvertes’, *Libération*, 5-6 May 2001, <http://www.liberation.fr/quotidien/semaine/20010505samb.html>.)

⁵⁷ Stora, *La Gangrène*, p. 271.

⁵⁸ Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ Stora, *La Gangrène*, p. 230.

lui, *il y reste* [...] et n'en bouge plus'.⁶⁰ So efficacious was this entombment of history, moreover, that eight years after Boumediene's death – when the past might to some degree be rehabilitated – an Algerian weekly could still proclaim, 'il n'y a de vrai héros que mort'.⁶¹ In popular consciousness, as the paper's own survey demonstrated, the 'true' protagonists of the Algerian War were those who had perished on the field of battle. Many respondents to the survey seemed, in fact, unfamiliar with all but a handful of wartime agitators, probably, concluded its author, 'parce qu'ils cherchent parmi ceux que les médias ont coutume de présenter en tant que tels, *et non plus dans leur environnement immédiat*'.⁶² Works of fiction from the 1980s, too, show the survivors of conflict as marginalized or neglected figures. Leila, a former victim of torture in Assia Djebar's short story, 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement', falls into drug addiction and is incarcerated in a psychiatric asylum; 'ils [...] complotent pour m'envoyer à l'hôpital' complains Ali, subject to similar abuse in Rachid Mimouni's novel, *Le Fleuve détourné*.⁶³

The latter text, indeed, constitutes an explicit indictment of the manner in which the Algerian 'revolution' would become encrypted. Returning, after years of amnesia, to his native village, an ex-*maquisard* finds his name inscribed on the war memorial, but his face forgotten. Welcome nowhere, he proceeds, in Mimouni's view, 'à une espèce d'enregistrement photographique de la réalité', seeking, in turn, some register of his own existence: the apparition 'that looks', from the shadows, 'at us [*qui nous regarde*]'.⁶⁴ Only the tortured Ali knows him for what he now is – a fiction that has no place in the canon, a version of history that cannot be reproduced. 'L'Administration', opens the novel, 'prétend que nos spermatozoïdes sont subversifs'.⁶⁵ When its unnamed protagonist persists in his quest to resurrect the past, upsetting the natural(ized) order and murdering the men who reduce his wife to sexual servitude, he is imprisoned, to await castration. In the official genealogy of Algeria, one legitimate bloodline alone subsists: a line untainted by contact with the 'orally' and 'carnally' transmitted ailments of the former colonizer.

⁶⁰ *Spectres*, p. 30.

⁶¹ 'Les Années de la liberté', *Algérie-Actualité*, 2-8 July 1987, quoted in Stora, *La Gangrène*, p. 305.

⁶² Ibid, my emphasis.

⁶³ In *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, (Paris: Des Femmes, 1980), pp. 11-62; *Le Fleuve détourné*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1982), p. 52.

⁶⁴ Thierry Fabre and Olivier Mongin, 'L'Algérie traumatisée: Entretien avec Rachid Mimouni', *Esprit*, 153 (1989), 68-77 (p. 71); Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 26.

⁶⁵ *Le Fleuve détourné*, p. 9.

The preservation of this bloodline, learns the veteran, demands his genitalia in forfeit. *Revenants* must never come (back) again.

Yet the spectre of dissent invoked and later condemned in Mimouni's tale was a harbinger of 'chaos' older than any colonial malaise; and non-conformity was no more a product of French influence than the prospect of abuse itself. Discord did not, to quote Derrida on Europe, 'befall' Algeria

Un jour, [...] comme si celle-ci, à tel moment de son histoire, en était venue à souffrir d'un certain mal, à se laisser *habiter* en son dedans, c'est-à-dire *hanter* par un hôte étranger. [...] [Car] il n'y avait pas de dedans, il n'y avait rien dedans avant lui.⁶⁶

Political organization, in pre-colonial Algeria, had been 'articulated by inexpugnable segmentary structures', and the organization which came to speak for post-colonial Algeria, the F.L.N., was, similarly, divided: at a combative level, into zones or *wilayas*; at a personal level, into factions of differing ideological persuasion.⁶⁷ In the face of external aggression, these units functioned, as the semi-autonomous tribes and principalities of the Ottoman regency had done, centripetally. What was to define the whole, in both instances, was an intermittent need for violent resistance; alliance in defiance, *as it recurred*, would open the space of the Algerian nation. Even after independence, 'threat' remained integral to the identity of a government fathered – in this sense – by the shadow of hostility. The ghostly 'subversive', on the other hand, 'se déplacerait comme [et avec] le mouvement de [...] [l'] histoire'.⁶⁸ The party's *raison d'être*, proclaimed the F.L.N. of 1965, was to 'deliver' the country '[des] intrigues tramées dans l'ombre, [...] des tendances et des clans ressuscités'.⁶⁹ When the menace of violence ceased to put in a physical appearance outside the borders of Algeria, the body of the newly created state began to mutilate its own members. The act of exorcism was also, it transpired, a summons.

Within a decade of the Evian Peace Agreements, the ranks of the 'war dead' had swelled by tens of thousands. Some 100,000 *barkis*, loyal to the French, lost their lives –

⁶⁶ *Spectres*, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁷ Mahfoud Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria 1830-1987: Colonial Upheavals and Post-Independence Development*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1988), p. 17.

⁶⁸ Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ 'Déclaration du Conseil de la révolution du 19 juin 1965', quoted in Stora, *La Gangrène*, p. 228.

often under the most appalling circumstances – in 1962 alone.⁷⁰ To these, merciless, killings would be added those of F.L.N. activists caught on the wrong side of an internal struggle which left the army, ultimately, in control. At the same time, official estimates as to the number of fatalities that had occurred *during* the conflict with France rose spectacularly. In 1962, the F.L.N. announced that ‘un million d’Algériens ont été tués dans la guerre d’indépendance’: a war ‘won’, it should be borne in mind, largely thanks to the *diplomatic* intervention of non-French powers. By 1970, however, the military leadership had succeeded in putting confrontation firmly back into the spotlight. Algeria, declared Boumediene, was ‘le pays d’un million et demi de martyrs’ – and the foundations of the state would, effectively, be reinforced with human concrete.⁷¹ Whilst the bodies of the long deceased afforded the F.L.N. legitimacy and a symbolic capital that it could continue to spend for the next twenty years, fresh corpses ensured a more practical dominance of the political scene. Horror was to repeat itself in more ways than one.

HERE AND THEN: *NEDJMA*

Mohammed Dib, alarmed, even in 1962, by what he perceived as the iterative tendencies of brutality, concluded:

Aller [...] décrire [l’horreur] dans ses manifestations concrètes lorsqu’on n’a pas à dresser un procès-verbal serait se livrer presque à coup sûr à la dérision qu’elle tente d’installer partout où elle émerge. Elle ne vous abandonnerait que sa misère, et vous ne feriez que tomber dans son piège: l’usure.⁷²

⁷⁰ The historian Michel Roux, on this note, observes: ‘Corps mutilés et ébouillantés, enterrés ou brûlés vifs, éviscérations et dépeçages à la tenaille, énucléations, lapidations, émasculations, membres arrachés ou découpés en lanières et salés ..., un invraisemblable raffinement dans l’horreur semble bien avoir marqué le massacre des anciens supplétifs dans les semaines et les mois qui suivirent l’indépendance’ (*Les Harkis: Les oubliés de l’histoire*, (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1991), p. 192).

⁷¹ Quoted in Stora, *La Gangrène*, p. 275. The statistics cited in both 1962 and 1970 differ widely, it should be added, from those reached by French historians. In 1983, Guy Pervillé and Xavier Yacono calculated that Algerian losses had been somewhere in the region of three to four hundred thousand; Droz and Lever propose a figure of 500,000 (‘Guerre d’Algérie: Combien de morts?’ in Ageron, pp. 275-276).

⁷² *Qui se souvient de la mer*, pp. 189-90.

To detail acts of violence outside a testimonial context was, Dib feared, to contribute to society's inurement to atrocities and hence – potentially – to pave the way for their return. His own, early, work on the Algerian War lent itself, as a result, not to the minutiae of horror, but to an oneiric elaboration of apocalypse: a vision of conflict which might, he hoped, impress the imagination much as Picasso's *Guernica* had done. It was an approach that the funereal tone and actions of the military appeared, increasingly, to justify. Where the centre of power was, as Mimouni later put it, to emit only 'une odeur de cadavre en putréfaction', Dib would privilege the ordeals of the psyche over those of the body.⁷³ Where the realist authors favoured by the state concentrated on the here and now of combat, he would situate an 'autre versant des choses [...] au mariage du paradis et de l'enfer'.⁷⁴ If he could not deny the ethical necessity of addressing horror, the 'substance' of his address, at least, was to be the nightmare, and not the enterprise, of war.

There were, however, other writers, publishing, like Dib, outside Algeria, who would eschew this separation of mind from matter without accrediting regimental history. Both Kateb Yacine and (I shall argue) Assia Djebar choose to invoke the physical residue of a violent past, stirring up the remains that successive governments condemned to stasis. What takes shape, in their work, is not so much a sublimated spirit of brutality, as the spectre of its consequences: an 'incarnation' of bygone suffering that inhabits the narrative space neither as a heaven, nor as a hell, but as a purgatory or limbo. Both, in different ways, challenge the primacy of the death scene, and their damaged protagonists elude (final) judgement, walking the text as witnesses to and of life, as well as the prospect of its extinction. In the struggling land that these Algerians (re)visit, the mutilated tissue that served Dib as proof of 'horreur accomplie' becomes evidence, rather, of a 'living-on' or 'beyond-living' which Derrida terms *sur-vie*, and whilst the apparition of scarred bodies does not necessarily testify to the physical survival of the

⁷³ *La Malédiction*, (Paris: Stock, 1993), p. 15.

⁷⁴ *Qui se souvient de la mer*, p. 191. The government-sponsored publishing houses tended, in fact, to issue *only* 'naturalistic' writing on war, as Jean Déjeux implies: "Répétez la guerre", "la révolution", "les acquises de la révolution", telle est [...] l'incitation des autorités pour les concours'. (*Maghreb: Littératures de langue française*, (Paris: Arcantère, 1993), p. 43.) Charles Bonn remarks, similarly, 'On demand[e] [à la littérature] d'être *authentique*, et cette authenticité repose, en fait, sur la subjectivité [...] des récits *vécus* (ou présentés comme tels)'. (*Le Roman Algérien de langue française: Vers un espace de communication littéraire décolonisé?*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), p. 121.)

individual, such bodies nonetheless remain constitutive of the state whose ‘representatives’ seek to bury them. For Djébar and Kateb, the broken contours of the torture victim are also those of a national ‘being’ that defies and exceeds any enforced historicization. Algeria, as they inscribe it, emerges not from the seamless continuity of a present predicated on exclusion, but from the temporal – and physical – fractures of the here *and* then.

To the French editors of Kateb’s ‘autobiographie plurielle’, *Nedjma*, this refusal to let the past pass seemed peculiarly, if not wilfully, Oriental. Whereas ‘la pensée européenne se meut dans une durée *linéaire*’, ‘la pensée arabe’, they inferred, ‘évolue dans une durée *circulaire* où chaque détour est un *retour*, confondant l’avenir et le passé dans l’éternité de l’instant’.⁷⁵ Whereas Western autobiographical convention demands that disparate events be recast as determinative experience, producing the illusion of subjective continuity, *Nedjma*, one might extrapolate, dispels that illusion, contorting chronological sequence into a spiralling series of overlapping episodes and *ir*-rationalizing each protagonist’s encounters. When we are first introduced to the eponymous *femme fatale*, she is not a participant in the drama of individual subsistence, but an ‘apparition’ vacillating, seductively, in the twilight of a ‘maison hantée’ (pp. 64-5); and the ghostly moment of desire evoked by the male narrator, here, seems emblematic. If phantoms, as Derrida claims, belong to a time which is ‘historique, [...] mais [qui] [...] ne se date jamais docilement, dans la chaîne des présents, jour après jour, selon l’ordre institué d’un calendrier’, then all appearances, in Kateb’s novel, are spectral.⁷⁶ ‘Prior’ action cannot be assumed, since it may be resumed, and the tense of narration ‘oscillates in a type of eternal and obsessive repetitiveness’ recalling the dictates of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: ‘Enter the ghost’, ‘exit the ghost’, re-‘enter the ghost’.⁷⁷

As in *Hamlet*, moreover, the return of the prematurely interred is, patently, a response to injustice. The figures that repeat their own doom, in *Nedjma*, are figures swept, like Hamlet’s father, from the course of sovereignty. The ‘unquiet spirits’ that haunt its pages speak, as he does, of atrocities committed and atrocities yet to come. Indeed, the work’s structural complexity is arguably as much a product of its engagement with physical

⁷⁵ *Nedjma*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1956), p. 6. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁷⁶ *Spectres*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ John D. Erickson, ‘Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*: A Dialogue of Difference’, *SubStance*, 69 (1992), 30-45 (p. 35); *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1982), I.1. Further references are given after quotations.

oppression *per se* as of any Arab ‘attitude [...] de *l’homme face au temps*’ (p. 6), and the intrusion of the *revenant* finds its parallel in another, equally untimely, effect: that of brutality on consciousness. In Kateb’s *Le Polygone étoilé*, the act of violence serves as a metaphor for the cruelty of working conditions that splinter existence into an infinity of identical moments; the immigrant labourer becomes ‘encore un Algérien à la torture’.⁷⁸ In his earlier novel, violence itself shatters the certainty of temporal elapse, confounding any expectation of progression in what is, strictly, the agony – and not the ‘eternity’ – of the ‘instant’. Under interrogation, discovers one victim, all mechanisms for the preservation of a self beyond pain appear futile; whilst, ‘seconde par seconde, une douleur lointaine et fulgurante se localis[e] dans les reins, aux genoux, à la cheville, au sternum, à la mâchoire’ (p. 60), his/story can persist only as an ‘informe généralité’ (p. 59).

Nedjma places its emphasis, primarily, on the erosion of the past effected by torture. The scene’s cognitive ‘casualty’, so to speak, is an edifice of self-justification constructed by the protagonist prior to the event – the lies and alibis that he prepares ‘dans l’attente de la torture’ (p. 59). Implicit in the description of perceptual shrinkage, however, is something that becomes explicit in Kateb’s account of his own arrest in 1945: the fact that physical abuse impedes an individual’s ability to project forwards, as well as backwards, through time. Insecurity in the future, he suggests, proved crucial to his initiation into the experience of repression:

C’était vraiment le plus dur moment, parce qu’on fusillait des gens; [...] je ne savais pas bien ce qu’on allait faire de nous [...] On peut dire que c’est la première fois que j’ai découvert mon peuple: j’ai compris ce qu’il était en train d’endurer ... Après la prison et tout ça, c’était fini, je ne voulais absolument plus continuer les études.⁷⁹

The *expression* of this insecurity seems, I would add, as pertinent to *Nedjma* as its ‘actuality’. Kateb’s anecdote, unlike his fiction, bears all the hallmarks of personal narration as it might ordinarily be construed. Memory ‘reads an allegorical meaning back into the past, [...] which is now seen as the place in which [the] present ego was formed and developed’; the moment of suffering becomes a moment of epiphany, and Kateb

⁷⁸ *Le Polygone étoilé*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966; reprinted Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997), p. 55. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁷⁹ ‘De “si jolis moutons” dans la gueule du loup: Propos recueillis par Nadia Tazi’, *L’Autre Journal*, 7 (1987), reprinted in Kateb, *Le Poète comme un boxeur: Entretiens 1958-1989*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994), pp. 13-35 (pp. 16-17).

Yacine the nationalist – and, by the 1980s, literary populist – is, ostensibly, ‘born’.⁸⁰ Yet there is, here, a paradox that recurs in the fiction, for even as he embarks upon the exercise in self-chronology requested by the interviewer, Kateb undercuts it. To interpret one’s past in formative terms is, on the one hand, and as Fredric Jameson points out, to assume ‘that the present (still then a future) was already there when the events of this past took place’.⁸¹ To insist that certain events effectively ‘stopped the clock’, punctuating the course of existence rather than propelling it onwards, is, on the other, to signal the complacency of such an assumption. The time of violence, implies Kateb, is a time in which future historical ‘subjects’ cannot, by definition, be conceived. Only with the artifice – and privilege – of *hindsight* may those blinded on the road to history return, uneasily, into its spotlight.

Nedjma’s protagonists belong to a generation that witnessed both the abortive uprising at Sétif, and the wide-scale retaliation that followed it: the generation, in Charles Bonn’s phrase, ‘du 8 mai 1945’, ‘qui doit mourir pour permettre le surgissement du 1er novembre 1954’.⁸² Lakhdar, the first to be tortured, is apprehended (as Kateb was) during the May riots, and the impasse to which the work’s circularity condemns him is also that of a nationalist movement left paralysed, for nine years, by repression. Acts of rebellion, in this context, appear as isolated – and isolating – as the blows that rain down on their instigators, contorting one limb, then another. There is, as Lakhdar observes after Sétif, no ‘*stratégie*’, and no gathering momentum save that of ‘*les automitrailleuses, les automitrailleuses, les automitrailleuses*’ (p. 57). ‘Logic’, for the protester, advances little further than the basic propositions, ‘on fusillait tout près. Tout près de la prison. Tout près de la prison’, ‘Lakhdar ne pouvait pas. Il ne pouvait pas ne pas boire’ (p. 60). The novel’s earlier, criminal, episodes are shorn of all but the most immediate causality; the main actors established through a string of disjointed and, as Bernard Arésu notes, ‘unpremeditated’ reactions to the hostile, pre-war, environment.⁸³ Its youthful protagonists, Mustapha, Mourad, Rachid and Lakhdar, pursue an achronological and erratic journey across Algeria, stumbling haphazardly from scuffle to scuffle, bar to

⁸⁰ Fredric Jameson, ‘On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution in the Third World: The Case of the Testimonio’, in *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, ed. Georg M. Gugelberger, (London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 172-191 (p. 181).

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 181-182.

⁸² *Le Roman Algérien*, p. 65.

⁸³ *Counterhegemonic Discourse from the Maghreb: The Poetics of Kateb’s Fiction*, Études littéraires françaises, 53 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993), p. 10.

building site, penitentiary to torture chamber, as each, in turn, is sentenced to imprisonment or flight. Although one woman fascinates all of them, what comes ultimately to characterize the group is neither a common desire, nor a common ambition, but a common impotence: in their world, ‘pour l’instant, tous les chemins mènent à la prison, ou à l’exil, ou au point de départ’.⁸⁴

SUMMONING THE NEW STATE

Kateb’s novel starts, and concludes, with a scene of resignation. Desperate for money, the four fugitives elect to part with Mourad’s knife, selling his weapon cheaply and framing the action, as they do so, between ‘twin’ images of unfulfilled potential and an abdication of the claim to power. Even that combative solidarity implied by the knife’s sale to a fellow Muslim could be deemed illusory, since the weapon returns, first, as the instrument of a racial murder which leaves the perpetrator incarcerated, and his companions dispersed; later, as a tool of fratricidal division. Yet the signs of failure are, perhaps, more ambivalent than they seem. As John D. Erickson points out, *Nedjma*’s ending is not simply a repetition of its beginning, but a ‘recontextualization of the [opening] syntax and verb structure’.⁸⁵ Lakhdar no longer ‘appears’, he ‘has appeared’, and an occurrence previously formulated in the present tense is fixed, if not in the remove of the preterite, at least in the past. The ghost may, so to speak, still walk, but his path has become distinct from the temporal ‘reality’ that it traverses. As Charles Bonn points out, the arrangement of the chapters that separate the two framing narratives – and hence their position within the text – might, equally, be seen to impose a historical ‘outline’ onto otherwise (or hitherto) dis-junctural events:

Les neuf séries de douze chapitres, camouflées par le jeu de trois parties doubles sous les six parties du roman, ne peuvent-elles pas être lues [...] comme une allusion implicite aux neuf années séparant l’échec nationaliste du 8 mai 1945 autour duquel les récits du roman se développent, de sa renaissance le 1er novembre 1954? Certes [...] [on] a montré que les textes qui composent le roman étaient écrits bien avant le 1er novembre. Mais leur mise en ordre et leur numérotation datent de l’hiver 1955-56.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Jacqueline Arnaud, *La Littérature maghrébine de langue française*, 2 vols (Paris: Publisud, 1986), II: *Le cas de Kateb Yacine*, p. 731.

⁸⁵ ‘A Dialogue of Difference’, p. 37.

⁸⁶ *Kateb Yacine, Nedjma*, p. 51.

Just as Kateb could, retrospectively, ‘enlighten’ the shadow of violence in his own youth, so too the violence of his novel may be re-read in such a way as to open out those moments experienced, in the first instance, as closure. In this re-reading, the knife that ‘cuts out’ the space of revolutionary interlude also, symbolically, ‘cuts into’ a certain revolutionary intertext: a narrative of insurrection in which brutality itself will instigate the formation, as well as deformation, of the Algerian ‘community’. Kateb’s weapon becomes a pointer to the struggle à (re)venir, and the Arabs he represents, ‘historical “objects” of a nationalist pedagogy, giving [his] discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given’ (but retroactively ‘constituted’) ‘historical origin or event’: November 1st 1954.⁸⁷ November 1st, the moment at which, as Fanon has it, ‘lui à qui on n’a jamais cessé de dire qu’il ne comprenait que le langage de la force, décide[rait] de s’exprimer par la force’.⁸⁸ *Nedjma*, from this perspective, marks the period of modern Algeria’s gestation.⁸⁹ Its protagonists exist, like Dib’s, ‘au seuil de la vie’; and more precisely, on the brink of a *prise de conscience* synonymous – for Fanon – with the realization that, ‘pour le colonisé, la vie ne peut surgir que du cadavre en décomposition du colon’.⁹⁰

Yet for all its nine-part structure, *Nedjma* enacts a process of collective ‘reproduction’ that might be better defined as *incubatory* than gestatory. In the context of Kateb’s work, moreover, the term retains much of its original, occult, resonance: it is here, as Laurence Rickels observes of Jones’s *On the Nightmare*, effectively

Plugged back into the incubus it contains: the incubus, who could assume the form of some animal to have intercourse with a living person sleeping in sacred precincts, was either the ghost of a departed ancestor or himself a god. The deep sleep that left one pregnant, often with prophecy though most frequently with the actual offspring of phantoms, was called incubation.⁹¹

The youths who err across the land- and time-scape of the novel are themselves subject to visitations, and ancient apparitions add their own fractures to a chronology that is, already, ‘out of joint’. Rachid, slumbering in prison, comes to discern ‘sa propre histoire

⁸⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 145

⁸⁸ *Les Damnés de la terre*, (Paris: François Maspéro, 1961; repr. Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 116.

⁸⁹ That this was a perspective which Kateb himself came to share may be surmised from his response to Nadia Tazi, in 1987, ‘Je voulais en effet atteindre une sorte d’accouchement de l’Algérie par un livre’. (*Le Poète comme un boxeur*, p. 27.)

⁹⁰ *Qui se souvient de la mer*, p. 57; *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 126.

⁹¹ *Aberrations of Mourning: Writing on German Crypts*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 9.

dans l'œil jaune et noir de Keblout', 'l'ancêtre au visage de bête féroce' (p. 134). Elsewhere, reunited with Mourad, he confides, 'ce sont des âmes d'ancêtres qui nous occupent', '[des âmes] des hommes dont le sang déborde et menace de nous emporter dans leur existence révolue' (p. 97). For the scattered remains of Keblout's tribe, there is, it appears, no legacy but (self-) destruction, and no course to be generated but 'la trace [d'une] ombre impossible [...] à déraciner' (ibid). Denied the shelter of his razed homestead, their undead patriarch has carved a living vault within the minds of his descendants, 'encrypting' himself, as it were, 'in a specific place in [their] ego[s]': a place from which, to cite Rickels, he 'guides' his orphaned hosts with a determination that neither murder, nor a return to the homestead, can blunt.⁹²

If the 'destiny' of Kateb's protagonists proves to be that of the mother who succumbs in childbirth, what prompts their labour is not, in this sense, the 'cadavre en décomposition du colon', but the *re-composing* body of an (equally archetypal) 'colonisé'. If these Arabs are, as Bonn claims, to bring to light 'l'idée de nation algérienne', it will be only 'grâce au pouvoir générateur' – and *incubateur* – 'du mythe', Keblout.⁹³ The sins of the past, in *Nedjma's* 'supernatural' scenario, do not simply demand a sacrifice of the present; they impregnate its every manifestation. Rachid, according to his own rhetoric of possession, incorporates both the spectre of paternal violation and the doomed son who answers him, as Hamlet does, 'I'll follow thee' (I.4.86). And he, like the Danish prince, seems 'en proie à des mots, à des actes, étranges et incongrus, traduits d'événements ignorés de [lui] et dont l'agent initial avait été' – in Nicolas Abraham's analysis – '*un autre*': the introjected phantom of a crime 'untold'.⁹⁴

For Abraham, indeed, spectres are always an inherited 'effect' of something "‘fantômisé” lors de la génération précédente, “fantômisé [...] pour avoir dû être couvert par le silence’. The ghost without, he contends, is but a projection of the ghost within; and the 'haunting' of the individual but a symptom of 'ce qui [...] gît [...] au fond de l'inconscient [...] comme science morte-vivante du *secret de l'autre*. Tel aussi le “fantôme” d'Hamlet'.⁹⁵ So it is, one might argue, with the figure of Keblout that arrives, unbidden, in Rachid's cell. In *Nedjma*, however, as in *Hamlet*, there is more than one 'someone else'.

⁹² Ibid, p. 10.

⁹³ *Le Roman Algérien*, p. 50.

⁹⁴ 'Le fantôme d'Hamlet ou le VI^e acte précédé par L'entr'acte de la "vérité"', in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), pp. 447-474 (p. 448).

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 450, p. 449.

Abraham follows Horatio in the conjecture that, '[only] if *thou* hast uphoarded in thy life/ extorted treasure in the womb of earth/ [...] [do] your spirits [...] walk in death' (I.1.139-141, my emphasis). Yet the secret (dis)-embodied by the king's ghost is not his alone, it is also Claudius's, and the secret (dis)-embodied by Keblout is not solely that of patrimonies lost, it is also that of patrimonies stolen. In both cases, the key to the 'enigma of apparition' lies beyond the reach of the question, who – or what – 'is' the spectral 'I'; rather, as the ghostly narrator of one of *Nedjma*'s (possible) namesakes remarks, 'tout [...] revient à savoir qui je "hante"'.⁹⁶ And in both Shakespeare's play and Kateb's novel, the answer is, theoretically, *dual*.

WHOSE GHOST?

'The funeral rite', observes Slavoj Žižek, 'exemplifies symbolization at its purest: through it, the dead are inscribed in the text of symbolic tradition, they are assured that, in spite of their death, they will "continue to live" in the memory of the community'. Where the dead are denied this inscription, where the trauma of their demise is not 'integrate[d] [...] into [...] historical memory', they may 'return' in an unearthly attempt to remind us of our own, obsequial, shortcomings. Ghosts, Žižek goes on, mark 'a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolization'. The appearance of the phantom signals the disappearance of the individual who has failed, or will fail, to find his 'proper place in the text of tradition'.⁹⁷ Fathers come back to sons, in *Nedjma*, to demand the recognition – and resumption – of forgotten failures, 'chargé[s] de gloire' (p. 97). Keblout comes back to Rachid, in *Le Polygone étoilé*, to evoke his tribe's erosion from each margin of the nation's vision. With neither monument nor mausoleum to 'seal' their passing, the Keblouti, he asserts, continue to die, and not to live: 'on ne meurt pas qu'une fois, [...] et par chacun de vous, je sais qu'on meurt éternellement, à petit feu, une cellule après l'autre' (p. 165).

⁹⁶ André Breton, *Nadja*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1928; rev. edn, Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 5. A detailed study of what he calls the 'affiliative ties' between *Nadja* and *Nedjma* appears in Hedi Abdel-Jouad's article, 'Kateb Yacine's Modernity: Rewriting Surrealism', *SubStance*, 69 (1992), 11-29 (p. 20).

⁹⁷ *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, (London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991), p. 23.

Kateb's narratives turn, for all that, on a 'double telling', oscillating *between* the ever unfolding 'crisis of death' and the 'correlative crisis', in Cathy Caruth's phrase, of life.⁹⁸ The Algerian 'ordeal', as these texts trace it, is at once 'the encounter with death' and 'the on-going experience of having survived [that encounter]'; at once a severance in the mind's perception of time and an unceasing endeavour to 'assume' that severance. Suffering, whether embodied or 'disembodied', intrudes 'too suddenly, too unexpectedly, to be fully known', and the horror of violence extends beyond any given, finite, moment: the torture victim, to cite one of Kateb's plays, 'aura des visions toute sa vie. Il criera comme un possédé'.⁹⁹ The profanation of the body, like that of the tomb, must 'play back', inexorably, across the 'nightmares and repetitive actions' of those haunted in – or by – its enactment.¹⁰⁰ As the very use of the term *possédé* might indicate, the historical 'spells' (re)cast through Kateb's work prove 'incubatory' in more than an occult sense of the word. *Nedjma*, in particular, weaves a tale of untimely and delayed responses that seems comparable to the story of neurotic incubation told by Freud.

In the course of his efforts to elaborate on a phenomenon which would now be labelled 'post-traumatic stress disorder', Freud draws one relatively simple analogy. A man walks away from the scene of some 'frightful accident', such as a train collision, 'apparently uninjured'. Weeks later, however, he comes to 'realize' the occurrence, developing 'a series of [...] psychical and motor symptoms, [...] [ascribable] to his shock, the concussion or whatever else [happened at the time of the accident]'.¹⁰¹ The time that elapses prior to the appearance of these symptoms is the 'incubation period': it is a period, to take Dib's (more politicized) example, in which actuality finds itself relegated to the 'sous-sol'. The subject 'above ground' remains unable to 'believe', in this instance, 'à tant de cruauté'; at most, he perceives 'des coups [...] frappés dans les fondations de la

⁹⁸ *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), p. 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 4; *Le Cadavre encerclé*, in *Le Cercle des représailles: Théâtre*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1959), pp. 15-67 (p. 53).

¹⁰⁰ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Religion. Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism and Other Works*, ed. Albert Dickson, trans. James Strachey, The Penguin Freud Library, 13 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 309. There is, it might be added, some dissent amongst mental health personnel as to whether the after-effects of torture, specifically, should be 'subsumed under Post Traumatic Stress Disorder'. (Barbara G. Melamed et al, 'Psychological Consequences of Torture: A Need to Formulate New Strategies for Research', in *Psychology and Torture*, ed. Peter Suedfeld, (New York: Hemisphere Publishing, 1990), pp. 13-30 (p. 14).) I use the expression here, however, solely in an attempt to elucidate the structure, and not the 'inspiration', of the narrative approach to pain.

cité'.¹⁰² What Freud might describe as the 'latent' drama of Dib's novel is that of a calamity which is not grasped at its inception, but becomes 'evident only in connection with another place, [...] in another time' – and, to return to *Nedjma*, another book.¹⁰³ Where *Qui se souvient de la mer* inscribes little more than a muffled undertone of (psycho-political) resistance, *Nedjma*, that is, starts to 'break down' such resistance, *exposing* the 'realities' of history, as Freud does, in the very face of their displacement.

Lakhdar's torture, presented, initially, in isolation, defies punitive 'logic' for several chapters after its infliction. The political import of his experience emerges not from any feature of the episode *per se*, but from the transference of its signs of violence into a second, ostensibly disjunct, context: the interrogation, towards the end of the text, of his friend, Mustapha. Both ordeals function, moreover, as a belated 'realization' of the first, destructive, impact of colonialism; 'or, la dispersion du 8 mai 1945 est également', to quote Charles Bonn, 'celle de la tribu des Keblouti'.¹⁰⁴ And *Nedjma* itself, in turn, leaves a residue of suppressed affliction to surface, compulsively, in the work which would 'reactivate' Keblouti trauma, *Le Polygone étoilé*. The latter, as Gilles Carpentier points out, constitutes a supplement to the 1956 novel, as much as its sequel: a disjointed assemblage of those 'fragments qui n'avaient pas trouvé place dans la première édition de Nedjma [*sic*]'.¹⁰⁵ Standing, so to speak, 'au carrefour du roman, de la poésie et du théâtre', *Le Polygone* is, in effect, a literary collage that superimposes new detail – and draws 'old' meanings – on to *Nedjma*'s earlier, anguished, sketches of Algeria.¹⁰⁶

Rachid and his peers stumble, in Kateb's second narrative, from the shadowy confines of the 1960s, only to move backwards, once again, through time. Propelled through war, through rivalry, and Sétif, they transverse childhood, blundering, eventually, 'outside' the structures of the novel and on to the set of Bugeaud's imperial drama. In this brief *mise-en-scène* of nineteenth-century conflict, hitherto obscure martyrs greet them:

Jean Xavier: J'étais en Algérie, dans la 7^e compagnie de discipline. J'ai tué un gendarme. On m'a exécuté à Bab El Oued, sur la place publique, le 26 février 1840. [...]
Rumeur publique: Il est mort courageusement. (p. 115)

¹⁰² Freud, *ibid*; *Qui se souvient de la mer*, p. 117, p. 19, p. 110.

¹⁰³ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ *Le Roman Algérien*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁵ Preface to the 1997 reprinting.

¹⁰⁶ Dust jacket of the edition cited.

Atrocity, as the Frenchman signals, crosses racial, as well as chronological, divisions.¹⁰⁷ The ghosts that have waited, here, in the wings of a theatre ‘hors de toute synchronie, avant même et au-delà de tout regard de notre part’, rise from cemeteries of Arab and European ‘denomination’ alike.¹⁰⁸ Jean Xavier, Corporal Lefebvre, et al, are both the instigators and the casualties of violence, both champions and antagonists of the status quo. They are, as it were, the predecessors of the ‘tripwire veteran’; of Claude Chabrol’s *Boucher*, that shell-shocked combatant who re-inflicts the butchery of the Algerian War on his own village, committing a series of barbaric (and finally suicidal) attacks ‘[qui lui viennent] comme un cauchemar’.¹⁰⁹ The horror of Kateb’s phantom legions, like Chabrol’s, is not ‘locatable in the [...] violent or original event[s] [of] an individual [...] past’, but in the threat that their apparition implies: the threat, to quote Caruth, that the ‘unassimilated nature’ of such events – the way [they were] [...] precisely *not known* in the first instance’ – may return to traumatize the perpetrators of brutality, along with its victims.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ As it did, indeed, in the nineteenth-century military communities that Kateb, intermittently, ‘resurrects’. The rank and file of the occupying army could be subject to summary execution, but were more frequently obliged to endure corporal punishments of a severity that both mainland inspectors, and the press, decried. Routine disciplinary measures of the time included *le supplice du clou*, which consisted, according to a *Gazette de France* of 1845, ‘à suspendre à un clou ou à une barre, par une corde qui réunit derrière le dos les pieds et les mains de l’homme déjà soumis [à d’autres supplices]’. Thus contorted, as the (appalled) journalist observed, ‘le condamné respire à peine et bientôt le sang injecte et empourpre ses yeux’. (Quoted in Pierre Guiral, *Les Militaires à la conquête de l’Algérie, 1830-1857*, (Paris: Criterion, 1992), p. 27.) One might, on these grounds, argue that the French themselves were the earliest victims of *institutionalized* torture in Algeria. The *muftis* or lawgivers of the pre-colonial era had consistently opposed such practices, and Islamic law, in any case, negates the primary ‘justification’ for torture, refusing to ‘recognize the validity of a confession obtained by coercion or threat of coercion’. (Peters, p. 92.)

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, *Spectres*, p.27.

¹⁰⁹ *Le Boucher*. Dir. Claude Chabrol. Parafrance. 1969. An equally pertinent, but non-fictional, example of psychological ‘over-spill’ is given by Fanon in the case notes that he entitles ‘Un inspecteur européen torture sa femme et ses enfants’ (*Les Damnés de la terre*, pp. 319-322).

¹¹⁰ *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 4. The military historian Anthony Clayton claims that this threat was to be ‘fulfilled’ in a different – and more wide-spread – fashion during the political convulsions of the nineteenth century, when the spectre of French activity in Algeria appeared on the streets of the *Métropole* itself. General Cavaignac’s suppression of the ‘June revolt’ was, Clayton writes, ‘a replica of the Algerian campaigns of Marshal Bugeaud [...] [Parisian] barricades were broken down, with North African experience and North African brutality’. ‘The scenario of 1848’, he goes on, would ‘be repeated [...] with the May 1871 repression of the Paris Commune by Marshal MacMahon, quintessentially an *Armée d’Afrique* general, assisted by others of Algerian [...] renown, notably de Gallifet’, who ‘personally ordered’ the

‘ARRACHER LE FUSIL...’

For Caruth, it has been claimed, ‘the “flashback” [...] is [...] the equivalent of the “interruption of a representational mode”, [...] [a] failure of linguistic representation’.¹¹¹ And Kateb, likewise, connects the spasms wrought by his indesignate spectres with the *enunciatory* ‘disorder’ of the Franco-Maghrebian space, as well as its cognitive disarray. The *revenant* – a ‘*thing*’, in Derrida’s phrase, ‘entre quelque chose et quelqu’un’ – comes to occupy that contradictory cultural zone which Homi Bhabha dubs a ‘place between the human and the not-human, between sense and non-sense’; a place where differences in speech and meaning tend to contort the paths of reason.¹¹² In the ghostly ‘mouth’ of Kateb’s *Polygone*, one might say, the ‘caesuras’ of colonial balladry become its utterances, and the clarion calls of Empire ring out as garbled echoes. One episode, indeed, so acutely underlines this metamorphosis that it is, I think, worth reproducing almost in its entirety:

Parmi les tortionnaires, un seul parlait l’arabe. On l’appelait le Docteur. Un jour, il vint chercher un vieux fellah. On l’avait amené la veille, pour avoir enterré une mitrailleuse dans son jardin.

Une mitrailleuse!

Le vieux ne savait pas ce que ça voulait dire. [...] Tout en lui protestait contre ce mot savant, cette arme ultra-moderne tombée dans son douar comme un aérolithe. Qui l’avait dénoncé? Peut-être un autre paysan torturé comme lui.

Ker! Krrrrr! crrrrrr! Ker! Krrrrrrrrrrrr! disait le Docteur.

Il voulait dire: Avoue!¹¹³

Mais il aurait fallu un *Ker* plus guttural.

Le Docteur ne pouvait ni appuyer le K, ni même rouler le *r*, à la manière arabe. C’était pourtant dans cette langue qu’il prétendait faire parler le fellah, pour montrer qu’il était un Pied-Noir averti, connaissant le jargon du peuple.

Ker! Ker! Ker!

execution of many of the 20,000 Communard fatalities. (*Soldiers, France and Africa*, (London: Brassey’s, 1988), pp. 22-23.)

¹¹¹ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 267.

¹¹² Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 26; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.125.

¹¹³ *Ker*, as the editors note, is the infinitive of the verb ‘to confess’ in Arabic.

Le fellah aux abois ne savait que répondre. Il suffoquait, se débattait, et ne comprenait pas, ne pouvait pas comprendre. En désespoir de cause, il se mit à crier, lui aussi, comme le Docteur:

Ker! Ker! Krrrrrrrr! Ker!

C'était donc si facile! On ne lui demandait qu'une onomatopée, le cri d'une grenouille! Oui, M'sieu. Ker! Krrrrrrrrrr!

Et l'interrogatoire se termina encore une fois par la douche collective sous le tuyau des inspecteurs, car nous avons suivi toute la séance, et, en proie au fou rire, nous répétions en chœur: Ker! Ker! Ker! Krrrrrrrrrrrr! (pp. 134-135)

Baffled by his torturer's inability to articulate the object of the interrogatory exercise, the *fellah* strives to show compliance in the very, mangled, terms that he is offered, reiterating the consonants of colonial command. The ostensible 'repetition of the "same"' proves, however, to 'be its [...] displacement', turning the authority of (*pied-noir*) 'culture into [...] non-sense precisely in its moment of enunciation'. The Doctor's attempt to assimilate Arabic into a universal narrative of investigation and insurgency founders on the breakers of the tongue itself; and the answering 'Ker Ker' that he elicits is evidence, to his audience, merely of uncertainty. As other prisoners take up the refrain, their cry disrupts the entire confessional process, undermining, to cite Bhabha on Conrad, '[its] dialectical, disciplinary [...] [assumption] of [cross] cultural reference and relevance': the assumption that confession *matters*. Just as the owl's 'Ya-acabo! Ya-acabo!' came back to Nostromo, in Conrad's novel, as a mocking indicator of subjectivity 'betrayed', so too, here, an amphibious croak comes back to the torturer, taunting him with its 'relativist' rendition of the 'rationale' behind his force.¹¹⁴

Kateb's *fellah*, himself an image of injustices re-called, a 'ghost' and thus, for Agamben at least, 'unstable signifier', reminds us that other signifiers can also 'float'.¹¹⁵ The success of his interrogation depends on the 'transparency' of the terms in which it is conducted, on the immediate identification of sound – *Ker* – with sense – *Avoue*: a 'phenomenon' that Derrida, working from the torturer's perspective, names loosely 's'entendre-parler pour vouloir-dire'. Yet this phenomenon, as Derrida specifies, is '*phénomène comme phantasme*'.¹¹⁶ There is no 'natural' link between the two halves of his ('x' *pour* 'y') equation; no 'natural' link between the Doctor's self-conscious appellation, *mitrailleuse*, and the

¹¹⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 137, p. 128; *Nostromo, A Tale of the Seaboard* (London: Harper, 1904; repr. London: J.M. Dent, 1957), p. 418.

¹¹⁵ *Infancy and History*, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ *Monolinguisme*, p. 48.

machine gun which he wants to signal; no ‘natural’ link, in short, between the signifier and signified. Utterance (hearing-oneself-speak) ‘equals’ meaning (*le vouloir-dire*) only in the degree that a particular ghost ‘equals’ – or rather does not equal – a particular person, a particular dead man. And the would-be ‘master’ of language (whether it be French or Arabic) cannot maintain ‘des rapports de propriété ou d’identité naturels, [...] congénitaux, ontologiques [...] [avec] ce qu’il appelle pourtant *sa* langue’. ‘Il [...] [ne peut pas] créer les conditions pour [...] que [*son “speech act”*] soit [toujours][...] efficace, productif, [...] générateur de l’événement escompté’. His grasp on sense is always ‘[une] construction politico-phantasmatique’, always, as Derrida has it, a presumption, ‘[une] croyance [...] [à] partager par la force ou par la ruse’, never a given.¹¹⁷

In the years preceding the publication of *Le Polygone étoilé*, Kateb Yacine had, for his part, formulated a similarly subversive approach to language: an approach that he would, most emphatically, spell out in a 1963 interview entitled, ‘Arracher le fusil des mains du parachutiste’.¹¹⁸ French, this interview suggested, was an unnatural ‘possession’ which its imperial masters *claimed* as their own, enforcing that claim through ‘interdictions, tabous, [...] humiliations sans nombre’. It was a metaphorical ‘gun’ brandished before the Muslim people, driving them back behind the boundaries of ‘un ghetto racial, social, colonial’. Like a gun, moreover, the language of *l’Hexagone* bore no national imprint that was intrinsic to its use. ‘Celui qui combat’, the writer remarked, ‘ne se [pose] pas la question de savoir si le fusil qu’il manie est français ou allemand ou tchèque. [...] C’est son combat qu’il sert’. ‘[Et] écrire en français, c’est presque, sur un plan beaucoup plus élevé, arracher le fusil des mains d’un parachutiste!’¹¹⁹ For Kateb, as for Derrida, the colonizer’s hold on (‘his’) language was a macabre conjuring *trick*, an illusion that might be unmasked, as it would be in *Le Polygone*’s burlesque, or over-shadowed in a violently re-appropriative act of seizure [*arrachement*]: what Derrida calls ‘le second tour’, ‘libération’, ‘émancipation’, ‘révolution’.¹²⁰

The *pied-noir* interrogator of *Le Polygone étoilé* finds himself, effectively, prey to several such manoeuvres. In the first instance, he falls foul of his own pretension to bilingualism; and in so doing, ‘hands over’ the keys to another, figurative, war chest. The ‘lexicon’ of

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 45 (my emphases).

¹¹⁸ Interview with Lia Lacombe, *Les Lettres françaises*, 7 February 1963, reprinted in *Le Poète comme un boxeur*, pp. 51-62.

¹¹⁹ *Le Poète comme un boxeur*, p. 53, p. 56.

¹²⁰ *Monolingualism*, p. 46.

laughter has often been identified as a crucial element in both the practice and experience of interrogation. It is, notes Ronald Crelinsten, encouraged ‘during torture classes’ as a means to strengthen ‘the group dynamic, [...] [and] to stifle the [...] individual conscience’.¹²¹ In Kateb’s fictional gaol, by contrast, ‘le discours [disciplinaire] de l’identité’ is momentarily, but momentarily, ‘mis à mal’, itself asphyxiated under an onslaught of collective, Arab, derision.¹²² The laugh, in this case, is very much ‘on’ the torturer.¹²³ Above all, however, and to borrow Sartre’s phrase, *Le Polygone*, ‘ouvrage [...] “de langue française”, plie *cette langue* à des exigences nouvelles’.¹²⁴ Its native narrator writes, like Fanon, ‘about [...] colonialism [...] from within a French space’ precisely in order to re-examine that space.¹²⁵ Behind the comic *séance* lies a self-effacing medium: the Francophone who ‘follows’ Derrida’s phenomenal phantasm, internalizing the duplicitous properties of the colonial ‘speech act’ so that they may betray themselves. The Algerian who ‘seizes’ the spectral ‘gun’ where he cannot seize the real one.¹²⁶

Yet following phantasms, as Hamlet discovers, is a risky business. Barely eighteen months after the combative assertions of 1963, Kateb was publicly to modify his view. ‘Notre poésie’, he announced, ‘[la poésie algérienne en langue française], est une arme à double tranchant. Elle nous a permis d’aller au cœur de l’ennemi, mais, en même temps,

¹²¹ ‘In Their Own Words: The World of the Torturer’, in *The Politics of Pain: Torturers and Their Masters*, ed. Ronald D. Crelinsten, and Alex P. Schmid, (The Hague: Centrum voor Onderzoek van Maatschappelijke Tegenstellingen, 1993), pp. 39-72.

¹²² Bonn, *Le Roman Algérien*, p. 203.

¹²³ As it is, in fact, in much *testimonial* literature on torture. The use of ‘black humour’ as a strategy of psychological resistance to interrogation is documented, for instance, in Ariel Dorfman’s study of memoirs from the 1970’s, ‘Political Code and Literary Code: The Testimonial Genre in Chile Today’. (*Some Write to the Future: Essays on Contemporary Latin American Fiction*, trans. George Shivers with the author, (London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 150-153.)

¹²⁴ Preface to Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p.40 (my emphasis).

¹²⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 295.

¹²⁶ This is not, of course, to deny the very *real* part played by (the French) language in Algeria’s fight for independence. As Fanon points out in ‘Ici la voix de l’Algérie’, the plethora of local Arab and Berber dialects ensured that the most widely intelligible terminology was, ironically, that of the colonizer, and illegal radio stations broadcasting in French were crucial in sparking and consolidating nationalist resistance across the country. (*L’An V de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1959); repr. as *Sociologie d’une révolution* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1968), pp. 51-82.) The impact of denunciatory and testimonial literature couched in an international ‘diplomatic’ language – a language that could be rapidly understood and disseminated outside Algeria – should also not be underestimated, given that it was negative publicity, as much if not more than military endeavour, that, ultimately, gave the F.L.N. the ‘upper hand’.

elle nous exile à l'intérieur de notre peuple.¹²⁷ *Le Polygone étoilé* comes to strike an equally despondent note. In its final episode, Mustapha, revisiting the scene of childhood, describes his early infatuation with the French language: an infatuation that his mother chose to accept but could not share, forcing herself, for her son's sake, into 'la camisole du silence' (p. 181). 'Ainsi', concludes the text, 'avais-je perdu tout à la fois ma mère et son langage, les seuls trésors inaliénables – et pourtant aliénés!' (p. 182). Outside wartime, literary as well as military 'marksmen' must, it appears, stand vulnerably alone. The turbulent ghosts of Kateb's œuvre would walk again in the fiction of other, exiled, writers; the opening of Mimouni's *Le Fleuve détourné*, indeed, is a self-conscious 'reprise [...] du début du *Polygone étoilé*'.¹²⁸ But within Algeria the erstwhile 'tricksters' of colonialism themselves became a shadow to be dispelled, and with each fresh wave of exorcisms, their 'statut', 'toujours provisoire', 'de mémoire d'Algérien, [devint] [...] plus vague' (*Le Polygone*, p. 133).

When Kateb died in 1989, officialdom made haste to mark his passing, and ministers of every rank massed round his grave whilst their imam called in vain for an interment in silence. '– Ô amis du défunt, [...] je vous le demande, [...] laissons, laissons ensemble Kateb Yacine enfin se reposer.'¹²⁹ 'Let what remains of him, *remain there*,' to reprise Derrida's refrain, 'qu'il s'y tienne et n'en bouge plus!'¹³⁰ Or, as Assia Djebar put it in her account of the proceedings, 'le poète, vite le poète à enterrer: enterrer sa parole'.¹³¹ Even the service for the dead would be cut short, as politicians hesitated, then refused to echo the responses that custom nonetheless decreed. And cabinets found other ways to halt reverberations in or of the name, Kateb. By the 1990s, all mention of *Nedjma* or its sequel had been 'implicitement interdite dans les départements [...] de l'université algérienne', and the works '[exclus] des programmes scolaires'.¹³² For the French, on the other hand, *Nedjma* would be encrypted as '[le] témoignage d'un peuple [...] irréductiblement algérien' (p. 5) and Kateb enshrined as an inert 'effigy' of alterity, not a wraith that comes and goes. 'Pour le public français qui le connaît,' writes Charles Bonn, 'Kateb Yacine est

¹²⁷ Untitled interview with Pierre Emmanuel, *Jeune Afrique*, 189 (1964) (reprinted in *Le Poète comme un boxeur*, pp. 143-145 (p. 143)).

¹²⁸ Charles Bonn, *Kateb Yacine, Nedjma*, p. 122.

¹²⁹ Assia Djebar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 189.

¹³⁰ *Spectres*, p. 30.

¹³¹ *Le Blanc*, *ibid.*

¹³² Waciny Laredj, 'Le Mythe de Kateb Yacine dans l'imaginaire "Arabophone"', *Europe*, 76 (1998), 198-205 (p. 202, p. 200).

plus un symbole que l'auteur de textes entrés dans un patrimoine de lectures commun'.¹³³
In the next chapter, I shall look at a second 'representative' of Algerian-ness which is often cited, but rarely disseminated, in France, often referenced but rarely sold in stores: the 1965 film, *La Bataille d'Alger*.¹³⁴

¹³³ Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma*, p. 113.

¹³⁴ At the time of writing, *La Bataille d'Alger* is not available on either D.V.D. or video in France, and has just been deleted from the British catalogue.

2

REBIRTH IN SORROW: *LA BATAILLE D'ALGER*

Si le cinéma ne nous donne pas la présence du corps et ne peut pas nous la donner, c'est peut-être [...] parce qu'il se propose un autre objectif: il étend sur nous une 'nuit expérimentale' ou un espace blanc, [...] il affecte le visible d'un trouble fondamental. [...] Ce qu'il produit [...] c'est le genèse d'un 'corps inconnu' que nous avons derrière la tête, comme l'impensé dans la pensée, naissance du visible qui se dérobe encore à la vue.

Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2, L'Image-temps*

Commentators on history, notes Dominick LaCapra, display a tendency to overlook or underrate the impact of traumatic scenes until more recent horror comes to light. Auschwitz, thus, was not a pressing issue for French authors before the atrocities of the Algerian war began their course; Israeli academics' interest in the Holocaust grew most after Palestinian casualties first occurred in floods. 'The movement of historical notice and knowledge', LaCapra infers, 'may [...] repeat in its own way the disconcertingly belated (*nachträglich*) temporality of trauma itself'.¹³⁵ Insofar as *Nedjma*, too, is commentary on past events, one might find proof in it to back such claims. The fighters of the F.L.N. are never featured in the novel – and yet their efforts pushed Kateb to mark out chapters and complete the whole. 'S'il n'y avait pas eu la guerre d'Algérie, *Nedjma* n'aurait pas été publié si tôt.'¹³⁶ The experience of post-Sétif persecution leads his young protagonists to confront the violence that the 1830s' annexation brought, to muse upon that earlier de-racination in the guise of Keblout's ghost. And the image of ancestral torment leads their elders, in turn, to recall antediluvian exiles, the flight from the Middle East, '[le] pass[age] par l'Espagne [...] [le] séjour au Maroc' (p. 124).

¹³⁵ *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 73-74.

¹³⁶ *Le Poète comme un boxeur*, p. 24.

At times, indeed, *Nedjma* seemingly evokes a cycle of bereavement without end, a chain of calamities in which each, successive, dispossession is displaced by the previous one, and all, eventually, are subsumed by the rhetoric of ‘éclatement originel’, ‘d’une tragédie [...] à l’épopée fondatrice’.¹³⁷ The anecdotes that ‘shape’ Rachid serve to compound this impression of what LaCapra, for his part, calls ‘structural’ as opposed to ‘historical’ trauma: the trauma, not of specific loss, but of a schism from or at the origin – ‘the separation from the (m)other, [...] the entry into language, [...] the fall from a putative state of grace, at-homeness, unity, [...] community’.¹³⁸ ‘De son enfance,’ the novel tells us, ‘il n’avait jamais pu saisir que des bribes de plus en plus minces, disparates, intenses: éclairs du paradis ravagé par la déflagration des heures’ (p. 166). ‘[Sa] dynamique’, Charles Bonn remarks, ‘[comme celle de Mourad, est] celle de l’enfermement et de la circularité close, [...] [non] celle de l’ouverture [...] [qu’évoquent] Lakhdar et Mustapha, [...] les seuls à laisser attendre implicitement un futur’.¹³⁹ Rachid’s fate, one might clarify, is to succumb to incessant mourning, to melancholy for an inexact and ill-expressed privation; his grief is never, in LaCapra’s terms, ‘historicized’, never tied to single troubles, to Sétif or to torture.

Perhaps, however, the narrative of incubation and gestation is testament to neither ‘structural trauma’ nor its inverse, but to the traits that often prove to render these distinctions problematic. The phantom, after all, configures one man’s loss as well as a more abstract absence; and historic terrors may assume a scale that leads the victims and their peers to question every truth, divinity. To those in mortal danger, God and gospel can well appear wanting in sense, in ‘substance’. ‘Foundational’ anxieties and precise fears do interact, in other words, ‘in complex ways’ within a concrete situation. ‘The temptation is great’, concedes LaCapra, ‘to conflate one with the other, particularly in [...] periods [...] of crisis’: particularly, to use Kateb’s phrase, ‘[quand on est] encore dans la gueule du loup’.¹⁴⁰ *Nedjma*, in any case, ‘conflates’ the ‘structural’ with the ‘historical’ only – it could be argued – by counterpoising them in the same space. Two characters, we learn, must later rot in isolation, bemoaning existential shortfalls. Two others move on from specific ordeals, before the closing pages send the four to (re)assess the paths they will tread, the paths to stasis and escape. In the initial part of this chapter, by

¹³⁷ Bonn, *Kateb Yacine, Nedjma*, p. 98, p.77.

¹³⁸ *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 77.

¹³⁹ *Kateb Yacine, Nedjma*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁰ *Writing History*, p. 48; *Le Poète comme un boxeur*, p. 28.

contrast, the tales examined are fictions from which points of ‘departure’ have gone missing and what subsists instead is an ‘arrival’: in a time that post-dates conflict, in a time in which *Algeria*’s anguish has in the main become enshrouded, cloaked by treatises on ‘constitutive’ lack.

Writing about Alain Resnais, the first *auteur* I speak of here, Jean-Claude Bonnet once observed, ‘[le réalisateur] tient à préserver le caractère fantomatique des êtres qu’il montre, [...] à maintenir ceux-ci dans un *demi-monde de spectres* destinés à s’inscrire [...] dans notre univers mental’.¹⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze would add the comment ‘le personnage dans le cinéma de Resnais [...] est passé par la mort [...] même s’il n’était pas en personne à Auschwitz, même s’il n’était pas en personne à Hiroshima...’.¹⁴² Both critics, then, alert us to a certain coalescence of determinate disasters with the diffuse upheavals that afflict the ‘subject’ in the (nonreligious) modern sphere. Both point up a ‘transference’ of trauma that facilitates its enciphering as function of a transhistorical collapse in certainties, and makes of everyone, potentially, a ‘tortured soul’. To some extent, to cite LaCapra,

One might suggest that [...] ghosts of the past – [...] revenants [...] [whose] death [was] so extreme in its unjustifiability that [...] it exceeds existing modes [...] of mourning – roam the post-traumatic world and are not entirely “owned” as “one’s own” by any individual or group. If they haunt a house (a nation, a group), they come to disturb all who live – perhaps even pass through – that house.¹⁴³

Yet the French films of the 1950s and 60s tend not to limit their engagement with abjection to the recognition of an extraneous ‘disturbance’, to empathic unsettlement on another’s account. Godard’s *Le petit soldat* may represent the nadir of this trend to melancholic identification with war victims – for the Frenchman, there, will suffer at the hands of F.L.N. interrogators – but the less ‘contentious’ movies I discuss also appropriate the pain of torture and tear it loose from cell, from place.¹⁴⁴ In *Muriel ou le temps d’un retour*, in *La Jetée*, *Le Boucher* and *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud*, the spectre of colonial brutality is no longer perceptible *as such*.

¹⁴¹ *Cinématographe* 103 (1984), quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2, L’Image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), p. 271 (my italics).

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 270.

¹⁴³ *Writing History*, p. 215.

¹⁴⁴ *Le petit soldat*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Société Nouvelle de Cinéma. 1960.

These, to put it psychoanalytically, are films in which Europeans ‘act out’ the scene of violence, ‘reliv[ing] the past as if [they] *were* the other’, rather than ‘working through’ that scene with a ‘critical distance’ which might permit them to live ‘in the present, to assume responsibility’ – for crimes in which their compatriots, or they, partook.¹⁴⁵ And the terminology of ‘repetition’ and ‘revision’, I shall argue, affords us insight, too, into the one work of the period that offers different angles on Algeria’s casualties, that sites traumatic episodes where they began, *La Bataille d’Alger*. This francophone, non-French, production and the *Nouvelle Vague*’s endeavours do, in fact, have common aims. They seek alike to disavow the reassuring *récit* of ‘right’ and ‘reason’ told and epitomized by Jacques Massu; they scrape the surface from his ‘non-stick’ version of the Western frame, which would deny the less appealing aspects of the past, wish them (and it) away. But *La Bataille* strives to re-enact in detail and in ‘consciousness’ the blows that prompt the flashbacks of the other films’ French veterans, giving incidents of agony some footing in the context of a carefully appraised struggle for independence and for change. What is at issue in the Algerian drama is not a generalized ‘hauntology’: it is ‘un demi-monde de spectres’ whose haunts are entirely defined.

The medium for his exercise in memory-work, in (per)orating history’s trials, has *a priori* ‘something of the night about it’. Cinema, to state the obvious, can and does dispense with daylight, illuminating sets, as well as screens, by artifice; cinematic processes confuse the categories that phantoms, night-walkers, likewise muddy. Before the lens, contended Barthes, ‘[on n’est] ni un sujet ni un objet, mais plutôt un sujet qui se sent devenir objet: [on vit] alors une micro-expérience de la mort [...] [on devient] vraiment spectre.’¹⁴⁶ Derrida, in his way, renders the connection between film, phantom, and the kind of controlled reiteration or analytic evincing of injurious experience that *La Bataille* tries still clearer. ‘On va se faire analyser au cinéma, en laissant paraître et parler tous ses spectres’; ‘le cinéma est une “fantomachie”. Laissez revenir les fantômes. Cinéma plus psychoanalyse, cela donne une science du fantôme’.¹⁴⁷ The *fantomachie* thus

¹⁴⁵ LaCapra, *Writing History*, p. 148.

¹⁴⁶ *La Chambre claire: note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard/Cahiers du cinéma/Éditions du Seuil, 1980), p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Jousse ‘Jacques Derrida et les fantômes du cinéma: Entretien’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 556 (2001), 74-85 (p. 78); *Ghostdance*. Dir. Ken McMullen. 1982. Quoted in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Échographies de la télévision: Entretiens filmés* (Paris: Éditions Galilée/Institut national de l’audiovisuel, 1996), p. 127.

described will constitute the subject matter of my second and third sections, which seek to trace the workings of Derrida's new 'discipline' throughout the tableaux of Algeria's pain, to demonstrate the action of his 'science' at an 'experimental' – and not purely, neatly, theoretical – stage. *La Bataille d'Alger*, I suggest, plays up the ontological 'disturbance' wrought (for Barthes) by any camera with varying success: filters and dissolves its shots to bring to mind the absent-presence of certain bodies lost from view, leaves others still invisible, 'unthought', *à revenir*.

CONTEXT/CONTRA-TEXT

In the opening scene of one of France's best-known films on suffering and memory, *Hiroshima mon amour*, two anonymous voices can be heard conversing over the images of nuclear destruction that lend this 1959 work much of its power. 'J'ai tout vu à Hiroshima', insists the woman, as newsreels, stills, and cinematic re-constructions pass before us. 'Quatre fois au musée', 'quatre fois au musée à Hiroshima', she intones, and the shots of bodies seared by the blast, of loose hair and skin preserved in formaldehyde, continue. But the man demurs:

LUI Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima, rien. [...]

ELLE Les reconstitutions ont été faites le plus sérieusement possible.

Les films ont été faits le plus sérieusement possible.

L'illusion, c'est bien simple et tellement parfaite que les touristes pleurent.

On peut toujours se moquer mais que peut faire d'autre un touriste que justement pleurer.

[...] J'ai toujours pleuré sur le sort de Hiroshima. Toujours.

LUI Non.

Sur *quoi* aurais-tu pleuré?¹⁴⁸

His response – the response, we will learn, of a Japanese orphan – reflects the dilemmas, and dangers, which non-European authors such as Dib came to associate with documentary exercises in the post-war age. 'As a form of *writing*' (or *filming*), to cite Michael Roth, 'history is always inadequate to history as experience or even as memory'. Yet it may, potentially, serve to create a 'positivist illusion' of the 'presence of the past'.

¹⁴⁸ *Hiroshima mon amour*. Dir. Alain Resnais. Argos-Films. 1959.

The female speaker could not have ‘seen’ Hiroshima, could not, in tourist terms, have ‘done’ Hiroshima because, as Roth simplifies, ‘*there is no Hiroshima to see*’. All that remains of the holocaust are ‘its traces, [...] in flesh, [...] in the stones that [...] “photographed” [...] objects burned into them’: negatives that the woman has, it seems, mentally processed as a ‘transparency’ of (or onto) the Hiroshima ‘*of that day*’.¹⁴⁹ She weeps, insinuates the man, not so much for absent realities as for a projection of atrocity framed – and edited – by her ‘own’, irradiant, imagination. ‘*Sur quoi aurais-tu pleuré?*’ he demands, and the camera pans across scorched, empty plains. ‘*La connaissance de Hiroshima*’ posited here, as Marguerite Duras, the screenwriter, put it, is ‘*un leurre exemplaire de l’esprit*’.¹⁵⁰

As the narrative unfolds, however, a second answer to the man’s question will emerge. For the nameless ‘elle’ of Duras’s dialogue, much of the emotional significance of Hiroshima lies, it transpires, in the timing of the firestorm that occurred there. News of the bombing reached her, she confesses, when she arrived in Paris after months of incarceration, the punishment for an affair with a German soldier. And the film’s partial insights into ‘his’ experience, that of his city, cede to a series of flashbacks: to the France of collaboration and *épuration*, to a drama that he draws out of the Frenchwoman by allowing himself to be possessed by it, assuming the ‘I’ of her long-dead lover. ‘*Je suis mort*’. ‘*Je t’appelle quand même*’, she replies, ‘*je crie [...] ton nom allemand*’ (my emphasis). If Alain Resnais, the director, has indeed only ever had ‘one cinematographic subject’ – ‘he who returns’, in Deleuze’s phrase, ‘from the dead’ – that subject, in *Hiroshima*, is European.¹⁵¹ The bereaved body of the Japanese proves, ultimately, to be a medium for the evocation of another’s loss, the secrets which he ‘channels’, those of a past still ‘buried’ in the ‘recesses of collective memory’.¹⁵² What the woman is to discern and mourn amidst the rubble of Hiroshima is not, for all her sightseeing, the public horror of the bomb, but the unacknowledged impact of the Occupation.

The paradox, then, of a project whose writer set out to end ‘*la description de l’horreur par l’horreur, [...] [et] faire renaître cette horreur de ces cendres en la faisant s’inscrire en*

¹⁴⁹ ‘*Hiroshima mon amour*: You must remember this’, in *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, ed. Robert A. Rosenstone (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 91-101 (p. 93, p. 94).

¹⁵⁰ *Hiroshima mon amour*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 10.

¹⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, ‘Optimisme, pessimisme et voyage: Lettre à Serge Daney’, quoted in Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema*, (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 32.

¹⁵² Greene, p. 45.

un amour [...] particulier', is that neither the horror nor the love that re-surges is itself 'particular' to 'those ashes'. 'Tout ce qu'on peut faire', observed Duras, 'c'est de parler de l'impossibilité de parler de HIROSHIMA': this, she claimed, was the crux of the opening exchange.¹⁵³ Yet *Hiroshima*'s rejection of any, delusory, 'representation of the past *as it really was*' allows it to erode even that explosive specificity which Duras's capitals might imply.¹⁵⁴ The Japanese city is as much a *tabula rasa* as the deserted Polish camps had been in Resnais's earlier *Nuit et brouillard*; a film whose narrator insists, similarly, on the inaccessibility of the terrors that archive footage may evoke:

Ces blocks en bois, ces châlits [...], aucune image ne peuvent leur rendre leur vraie dimension, celle d'une peur interrompue. Il faudrait la paille qui servait de garde-manger et de coffre-fort, la couverture pour laquelle on se battait [...] De ce dortoir de brique, de ces sommeils menacés, nous ne pouvons que vous montrer l'écorce, la couleur.¹⁵⁵

Like *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Nuit et brouillard* cuts between images of annihilation 'in progress' – German news broadcasts, snapshots, 'home movies' preserved at the museums of Auschwitz and Maideneck – and the open spaces which are left after the passage of destruction. And like *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Nuit et brouillard* comes to efface the identity of the victims it ostensibly 'recalls'. The camp inmates whom we see 'humiliated, tortured and desecrated [...] are not specifically designated' either as Jews, or as resistance fighters condemned by the *Nacht und Nebel* edict of the film's title.¹⁵⁶ Their guards remain anonymous, partially obliterated, out of shot. 'Ont-ils vraiment un autre visage que le nôtre?' asks the narrator, and as the camera tracks for the last time through the ruins of Birkenau, a final, self-, indictment sounds. 'Il y a [...] ceux qui n'y croyaient pas. [...] Et il y a nous, [...] qui feignons de croire que tout cela est d'un seul temps et d'un seul pays, [...] qui n'entendons pas qu'on crie sans fin.'

¹⁵³ *Hiroshima*, p. 11, p. 10.

¹⁵⁴ Roth, p. 93.

¹⁵⁵ *Nuit et Brouillard*. Dir. Alain Resnais. Argos-Films. 1955.

¹⁵⁶ Rebecca Pauly, *The Transparent Illusion: Image and Ideology in French Text and Film*, Ars Interpretandi 3, (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 22. The so-called 'Night and Fog' decree was drawn up in response to Hitler's 1941 instruction 'de ne plus faire juger dans les pays occupés que les cas où, d'après le droit en vigueur, on pouvait compter avec certitude et dans le délai le plus bref sur une condamnation à mort, et d'envoyer par contre tous les autres accusés [...] "dans la nuit et le brouillard", au-delà de la frontière, où ils seraient [...] complètement isolés du monde extérieur'. (Joseph de La Martinière, *Le Décret et la procédure Nacht und Nebel*, quoted in Richard Raskin, *Nuit et brouillard* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1987), p. 17.)

For Alain Resnais, he would claim, ‘the whole point [of *Nuit et brouillard*] was Algeria’.¹⁵⁷ ‘La guerre d’Algérie commençait en France’, explained the director, ‘et il y avait déjà [...] des camps de regroupement. Donc [...] j’ai fait le film [...] avec cette idée que ça [la mentalité concentrationnaire] reprenait d’une certain façon’.¹⁵⁸ The ‘endless cry’ of the closing sequence thus ‘foretells’ both *Hiroshima*’s re-vision of ‘modern history as trauma’, and its insistence on ‘symptomatic acting-out’ and *displacement* as an alternative to narratives of anteriority perceived as treacherously ‘totalizing’.¹⁵⁹ Where *Hiroshima* retroactively ‘re-writes’ the woman’s encounter in Japan as a traumatic realization of her earlier ordeal in Nevers, *Nuit et brouillard* gestures towards a future in which the atrocities of the Shoah will themselves ‘play back’ elsewhere. Neither integrates the brutality of the past into ‘a coherent cosmogony [...] lead[ing] (chrono) logically into the present’.¹⁶⁰ Horror, in Resnais’s argument as in Dib’s, ‘knows’ repetition, but ‘ignores’ depth; and more precisely, ignores the *sepulchral* depth assigned it by advocates of that theory which Resnais dubs ‘Plus jamais ça’. *Nuit et brouillard* is not, to use his own epithet, ‘un film “monument aux morts”’.¹⁶¹ It is the jump-cut ‘animation’ of nine million unquiet ghosts.

The 1955 work proved, in some instances, uncannily prescient. Vel d’Hiv, frozen, here, as though weighed down under its queue of deportees, would soon be repopulated by throngs of Algerian ‘disappeared’. With hindsight, the travelling colour shots of what was then present-day Poland appear to traverse a ‘prisonlike world of *temps morts*’ or ‘waiting’ similar to that inhabited by *Nedjma*: a world growing heavy, once again, in anticipation of (re-) apparitions still to arrive.¹⁶² *Nuit et brouillard*, to quote Derrida on *Hamlet*, ‘begins’ and ends ‘dans l’imminence [...] du spectre’.¹⁶³ The film’s ‘incubi’ differ, however, from those of *Nedjma* – and *Hamlet* – in one significant respect. In Kateb’s text, like Shakespeare’s, the reproduction or ‘représentation [...] du “fantôme”’ adheres to the supernatural ‘convention’ laid down by André Breton: what he calls, ‘[l]’ aveugle

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Charles Krantz, quoted in Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 369.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Richard Raskin, quoted in *Nuit et brouillard*, p. 51.

¹⁵⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 193.

¹⁶⁰ Lynn A. Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and the Representation of History in Postwar France*, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 22.

¹⁶¹ Raskin, p. 51.

¹⁶² Greene, p. 32.

¹⁶³ *Spectres*, p. 22

soumission à certaines contingences [...] de lieu'.¹⁶⁴ Keblout confines his visits to the towns and villages of Algeria; just as Hamlet's father manifests himself solely 'on' Danish land. What *Nuit et brouillard* suggests, by contrast, is that the traumatic transference of the spectral may operate across *geographical*, as well as temporal, boundaries.

Resnais's intimation that the 'path' taken by *revenants* could lie outside geography – nowhere, or anywhere – was not, of course, uniquely his. *Nuit et brouillard*, indeed, was simply the first in a series of cinematic narratives to invoke the spirit of Algeria *hors contexte*. The time-travelling 'Spectre' of 1962's *La Jetée*, to take a single, subsequent, example, finds himself dragged through an 'underworld' where the prisoners are white, and the gaolers speak German, but the instruments of coercion (blindfolds, electrodes) bear a peculiar resemblance to the colonial interrogator's tools of trade (figure 1).¹⁶⁵ In Chris Marker's futuristic hell, the 'fantasme conceptuel [...] [de l'] *ontopologie*' – an axiomatics linking 'l'être-présent' ('present-being' or, in the case of a ghost, 'absent-being') 'à sa situation, à la détermination [...] d'une localité, le *topos* du territoire, du sol, de la ville' – seems long 'outdated'. The 'jetty' of the title, 'la grande jetée d'Orly', subsists only as the petrified image of an origin which cannot be reclaimed; a Parisian past made obsolete by the 'dis-location télé-technique' of the tortured subject.¹⁶⁶

'Sovereign' identity, in *La Jetée*, is a casualty of war-science. Spectre's role, he discovers, is to provide his captors with the intelligence so thoroughly wiped from collective ('subterranean') memory that it must be garnered *across* time and place. 'Le champ de bataille', here, 'n[est] plus un champ clos'. 'Sa frontière', to quote the military ideologue Roger Trinquier, 'est immatérielle'; it can encompass – or exceed – entire nations, entire histories.¹⁶⁷ And this is also the assumption that underpins the 'myth [...] of the *appelé déboussolé*, the conscript who has lost his bearings' or 'tripwire veteran': a myth propagated by French filmmakers as early as 1957, when *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* turned the paratrooper's gun on to his new, arms dealing, boss.¹⁶⁸ 'Toute époque', notes Derrida, 'a

¹⁶⁴ *Nadja*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ *La Jetée*. Dir. Chris Marker. Argos-Films. 1962. Although the film's principal protagonist does not have a 'name' as such, the identifying epithet used here is the one employed by the woman he befriends: 'Elle l'appelle son Spectre'.

¹⁶⁶ Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁷ *La Guerre*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1980) p. 47, p. 158. This text summarizes the arguments presented in Trinquier's two most influential works of the 1960s, *La Guerre moderne* and *Guerre, Subversion, Révolution*.

¹⁶⁸ Philip Dine, *Images of the Algerian War: French Fiction and Film, 1954-1992*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 145; *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*. Dir. Louis Malle. Nouvelles Éditions. 1957.

sa scénographie’, ‘un *certain* théâtre des revenants’. The 1960s ‘theatre’ of the haunted soldier (a theatre to which Derrida, with his insistence on the ‘archaism’ [du] fantasme [...] de l’État-nation’, perhaps himself subscribes) showed little taste for imperial drama.¹⁶⁹ Unlike Kateb’s nineteenth-century mutineers, who re-surface in the land of their demise, the protagonists of *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud*, *Le Boucher*, et al, ‘return’, for the most part, to an un-Algerian space; and the ‘tripwire veteran’s [dé]raison d’être is rarely, if ever, to be found in his defence of Empire. What occurs in these films is not so much, as Philip Dine claims, ‘the metamorphosis of the military Self into the Other’, but the metamorphosis of the Other into a Self now desperate to downplay its martial traits.¹⁷⁰ *Le Boucher* recasts shellshock as an outburst of primitive, Cro-Magnon, rage ‘indigenous’ to Périgieux. *Ascenseur* (ir)rationalizes anti-colonial action as a variation on the theme of the *crime passionnel*, reducing Algeria to a single out-of-focus backdrop, a setting for the portrait that police and press must use in order to track down ‘their man’.¹⁷¹

Ironically, moreover, it is the ‘radical incommunicability of the “Algerian experience”’ which allows that experience to be ‘translated’ into the familiar idioms of barbarism or blind passion.¹⁷² ‘Vous savez, mademoiselle, j’en ai vu des cadavres, moi’, observes *le boucher*. Yet the point is, in fact, that the woman who serves as character-narrator, whose eyes are also those of the viewer, does not, cannot, or refuses to know. The sole ‘knowledge’ that she offers is, so to speak, self-consciously *ersatz*, a (re) vision of atrocity substituting animals slain by the hunter/butcher for the human fatalities of politics and war. *Hiroshima*, it could be argued, plays devil’s advocate, summoning a phantasmagoria of ghastly ‘simulacra’ the better to debunk them. The ‘scenography’ of the veteran insists that even these ‘reconstitutions, [...] faites le plus sérieusement possible’, be ‘always

¹⁶⁹ *Spectres*, p. 194, p. 137.

¹⁷⁰ *Images of the Algerian War*, p. 182.

¹⁷¹ An identical exercise in compression was to occur in *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, which takes a conscript’s departure for Algeria as the first ‘panel’ in its musical triptych of love and loss. Once he has left, his sweetheart (and by extension, the viewer) proves unable to envisage the hero’s suffering in any detail other than that evoked by an army snapshot. *Cléo de 5 à 7* uses a broadcast on a taxi radio to similar effect, displacing the *image* of overseas conflict onto a variety of ‘exotic’ street performers, who insert spikes into their arms, swallow frogs, and so on. Unlike the other films discussed here, however, *Cléo* suggests that ‘denial’ may in fact jeopardize France’s chances of survival, as well as those of its eponymous heroine. Only after the interventions of an unusually candid soldier can Cléo accept – and accept treatment for – her own cancer: itself, at the time, a metaphor for torture. (*Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*. Dir. Jacques Demy. Ciné Tamaris. 1964; *Cléo de 5 à 7*. Dir. Agnès Varda. Rome-Paris Films. 1962.)

¹⁷² Dine, *Images*, p. 223.

already' suppressed. As the Algerian novelist, Rachid Boudjedra, complains of Resnais's own contribution to the genre:

Muriel [ou le temps d'un retour] n'est pas un film sur l'Algérie, mais un film où il est question d'Algérie comme une pensée gênante que chacun cherche à oublier. Comme le dit l'ami tortionnaire au protagoniste: "Tu veux raconter Muriel? Muriel, ça ne se raconte pas."¹⁷³

In the *temps d'un retour* delimited by the work's title – *le temps d'un retour*, in fact, *en France* – the nationalist, never visible, never fully re-membered, comes to symbolize 'la faillite des images devant [...] [un] immontrable: non pas la torture mais le sentiment qu'éprouve celui qui torture, celui qui se déshumanise'.¹⁷⁴ The protagonist seeks to 'rehumanize' himself by publicly identifying a woman whom he recorded in the throes of torture, and naming her, to those around him, 'Muriel'. But Muriel remains absent from the film-within-a-film that should, in his mind, testify to the horror of culpability, as well as pain. When the grainy 'amateur' footage eventually flickers past, we see nothing more than soldiers, laughing while they pound against a darkened, prison, door (figure 2).

Disabused of any notion of expiation, *Muriel's* protagonist proves as incapable of socialization as those of *Le Boucher* and *Ascenseur*; as ill-suited, in Benjamin Stora's words, 'à une autre vie dans la société française alors en plein changement'.¹⁷⁵ He, like they, succumbs to 'senseless' homicidal impulse, gunning down a former colleague on the streets of Boulogne. If this 1963 film shows a man more overtly possessed 'par la mort des autres' – or *de l'Autre* – than either the earlier or the later work, it is nonetheless bound to a similar system of spatial and geographical apartheid. The soldier's final gesture completes, rather than opens, the circle of 'barbelés autour de sa [...] personne', 'en niant à l'autre', once again, 'sa valeur d'être humain'; and *interracial* conflict is recognized exclusively in terms of its impact on the aggressor. In the whitened world of 'tripwire veterans', the formidable competence of the French war machine is transmuted into a (dubious) 'efficacité [...] souterraine, puisque inconsciente'.¹⁷⁶ Scored across the

¹⁷³ *Naissance du cinéma algérien*, quoted in Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli*, p. 41; *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour*. Dir. Alain Resnais. Argos-Films. 1963.

¹⁷⁴ Raphaëlle Branche, '1963-1977: quinze ans et dix-sept films: douloureuses mémoires', *Ciném.Action*, special number, 'La Guerre d'Algérie à l'écran', 85 (1997), 57-67 (p. 66).

¹⁷⁵ *Imaginaires de guerre: Algérie – Viêtnam, en France et aux États-Unis* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1997), p. 176.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

antihero's 'psyche', the everyday effects of 'pacification' acquire the 'aberrant' features of sociopathy and habitual violence, the traits of spasmodic derangement.

'En Algérie', summarizes Stora, 'c'étaient les "événements", et cette minimisation langagière d'une guerre s'impose au niveau de l'image'.¹⁷⁷ The United States was the sole country to include 'ground' coverage of the conflict in its news bulletins, and of the many French films produced in the 1960s, 'une seule œuvre, *Les Oliviers de la justice*, de l'Américain James Blue, [...] se passe en Algérie'.¹⁷⁸ 'Au cinéma', one might paraphrase, 'ce n'étaient *que* des "événements": 'singular' intrusions into the otherwise seamless continuity of a peaceful present. The stories told here, of nameless camps, of time-travellers and psychotics, 'screen out' explicit references to foreign agency, just as *Hiroshima* 'screens out' the image of the mushroom cloud. History itself, in these films, becomes 'traumatized', compulsively acted out, but not 'worked through'. Horrific scenes 'jump' from one cultural 'body' to another. And as the spectres of warfare traverse a stage as alien to them as they to it, *la guerre d'Algérie* comes, increasingly, to be 'presented as something that happened, not as something that was done'.¹⁷⁹

'LA PREMIÈRE GRANDE PRODUCTION ALGÉRIENNE'

Torture, for its French apologists, seemed neither more nor less than a military necessity. 'Entre deux maux,' noted General Jacques Massu,

Faire souffrir passagèrement un bandit pris sur le fait [...] et, d'autre part, laisser massacrer des innocents que l'on sauverait si, de par les révélations de ce criminel, on parvenait à anéantir le gang, *il faut sans hésiter choisir le moindre: un interrogatoire sans sadisme, mais efficace*.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ *Imaginaires de guerre*, p. 176, p. 121.

¹⁷⁸ Michel Cadé, 'Les films des années 60: d'abord les effets sur les Français', *CinémAction*, 85 (1997), 48-56 (p. 51). *Les Oliviers de la justice*, Cadé points out, was a *pro-colonial* film, 'ne donn[ant] guère de place, [...] [au point de vue] du colonisé et à sa révolte' (p. 52).

¹⁷⁹ Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, 'America's Vietnam War Films: Marching Towards Denial', in *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, ed. Dittmar and Michaud (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 1-15 (p. 12).

¹⁸⁰ *La vraie Bataille d'Alger*, (Paris: Plon, 1971), pp. 161-162. The so-called 'ticking time-bomb' theory elaborated here – and now known, in France, as *Massuisme* – has, it should be added, had numerous proponents outside the military. Jeremy Bentham put forward a similar argument for interrogation as early

In this sanitized scenario, the act of interrogation was always, in a sense, an act of exorcism: a process by which ‘someone else’s secret’ might be deliberately, and momentarily, ‘materialized’ in order to spare the ‘innocent’ collective the threat of any future possession by dark forces. ‘Réduire’ *cette menace*, to modify Nicolas Abraham’s cathartic formula, ‘[la faire] évanouir dans un monde passé’, ‘c’[était] réduire la culpé attachée au secret de l’autre et l’énoncer en mots dicibles’. One could put a halt to haunting by ascertaining what ‘uphoarded [...] treasure’ ‘made’ the spectre and conjuring him to speak its name. One could avert tragedy by forcing ‘le fantôme’, the secret-keeper, ‘au grand jour’, against his will, ‘en domestiquant ses (et nos) résistances, ses (et nos) refus, [...] [en faisant] accepter un degré supérieur de “vérité”’.¹⁸¹ Under the terms of Massu’s argument, like Abraham’s, the ‘enigma’ to be accessed through ‘(dis-) articulation’ was invariably guilt, and the ‘truth’ that triumphed over resistance invariably that of a ‘rational’ Self: the ‘dispassionate’ analyst, the ‘fair-minded’ soldier. To the general’s mind, indeed, there was little cause to *battre* – or *réduire* – *la culpé*, since penitence need never enter the equation. The *gégène*, he claimed, left no lasting damage (‘je l’ai expérimentée sur moi-même’); the ‘other’, dispossessed of ‘his secret’ by responsible servants of the state (and Church), ‘s’en remet’.¹⁸²

‘L’exorcisme efficace’, however, ‘ne [...] constate la mort’, in Derrida’s words, ‘que pour mettre à mort’.¹⁸³ The conditions ‘crucial’ to the ‘evaporation’ of the phantom are

as 1777, commenting, ‘Torture may be with propriety be applied [...] where a man is required what probably [...] it is in his power to do; and [...] which the public has so great an interest in his doing that the danger of what may ensue from his not doing it is a greater danger even than that of an innocent person’s suffering the greatest degree of pain that can be suffered by Torture’. (University College London, Bentham MSS, 46/63-70, quoted in W. L. Twining and P. E. Twining, ‘Bentham on Torture’, *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly* 24.3 (1973), 305-356 (pp. 312-313).) More recently, the American philosopher Michael Levin chose to court controversy in the popular press with an article entitled ‘My Turn: The Case for Torture’ (*Newsweek*, 7 June 1982, p. 13).

¹⁸¹ ‘Le fantôme d’Hamlet’, p. 451, p. 450, p. 451, p. 450.

¹⁸² *La vraie Bataille*, p. 165, p. 168. Massu’s views were, he contended, common to all members of the 10th Para Division under his command, including the chaplain, Père Delarue. Other testimony tends to support this allegation of Catholic complicity, and one ex-torturer spoke recently of wide-spread, ecclesiastic, propaganda: ‘J’[avais] lu [...] dans une circulaire écrite par un prêtre, qu’ [...] il existe une torture nécessaire, donc religieusement excusable’. (Jean-Pierre Vittori, *On a torturé en Algérie* (Paris: Ramsay, 2000), p. 133.)

¹⁸³ *Spectres*, p. 85.

also the conditions which *create* phantoms, and the forcible disclosure of one, undead, ‘secret’ may simply engender another. The torturer/exorcist runs the risk of granting an after- ‘life’ to the very threats that he proposed to terminate. Massu, having neutralized the terrorist menace embodied by the communist Henri Alleg, found himself obliged to dispel an equally damaging ‘spectre’ of abuse, and remarked, ‘M. Alleg, qui a si complaisamment récit  sa torture de 1957, m’a paru d’un dynamisme rassurant, en mars 1970’.¹⁸⁴ The general’s memoirs, in fact, resemble nothing so much as a prolonged exercise in shadow boxing. *La vraie Bataille d’Algers* is divided not into chapters, but ripostes to the questions, ‘Quelle est votre m thode de lutte contre le terrorisme?’ ‘Mais le renseignement, jusqu’o  allez-vous pour l’obtenir?’ ‘La torture a-t-elle  t  autoris e?’ Even its illustrations appear calculated to respond to some, resurgent, accusation: self-composed French soldiers are juxtaposed with giggling Algerian ‘poseuses de bombes’ and the army’s healthy-looking captives with a macabre gallery of corpses mutilated by the F.L.N.

Jacques Massu, he admitted, owed much of his interrogatory ‘expertise’ to the ‘battle’ named in this book’s title: a (microcosmic) war of reprisals that had worked its way gradually across Algiers between 1956 and 1957. When the violence there began to escalate, the general, then commander of an elite Paratroopers Division, was summoned and ‘granted full responsibility for maintenance of order in the city’. His nationalist counterpart, the head of ‘a meticulously organized hierarchy [of] some 1,400 [F.L.N.] operators’, was a Muslim named Yacef Saadi.¹⁸⁵ And it was Saadi, rather than Alleg, who would be ‘resurrected’ as Massu’s principal *b te noire* in the latter’s account of military confrontation. ‘Que pensez-vous de Yacef Saadi?’ ‘*Yacef Saadi n’a pas sa place parmi les H ros de l’Histoire*’ ‘replies’ the Frenchman, after transcribing various ‘confessions’ of cowardice by the Algerian.¹⁸⁶ Just as Abraham sets himself the task of exorcizing one totemic, martyred, figure, healing ‘le *public* [...] d’une n vrose occulte qui [...] lui est inflig e par la Trag die d’Hamlet’, so too Massu, here, determines to banish the ghost of a terrorists’ ‘monarch’ *by proving that he has lied*.¹⁸⁷ For the general, as for the analyst, ‘historical truth’ was a missile that must fly – fatally – in the face of apparitions and

¹⁸⁴ *La vraie Bataille*, p. 168.

¹⁸⁵ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*, (London: Macmillan, 1977; rev. edn., London: Papermac, 1996), p. 188, p. 185.

¹⁸⁶ Massu, p. 307.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Le fant me d’Hamlet’, p. 451.

appearances alike; and whilst 'la *vraie* Tragédie d'Hamlet' was that Hamlet's *father* had committed murder, 'la *vraie* Bataille d'Algers' was a conflict waged by loose-tongued traitors.

The comparison is not as far-fetched as it seems. Yacef Saadi himself is no tragic *revenant*; he escaped execution and survived the Algerian War. Yet the image that Massu sought to dissipate *was* a fictional one, and the spectre that most dogged him not that of Saadi, but Djafar, the F.L.N. leader played by Saadi in the 1965 film which had been credited as 'la première grande production Algérienne': *La Bataille d'Alger*.¹⁸⁸ The 'battle' declared in General Massu's memoirs proved, effectively, to be a battle between two docu-dramatic re-constructions; 'la véritable physionomie de Yacef Saadi', the key to a French attempt to counter-(reen)act the charismatic 'chef rebelle'.¹⁸⁹ *La Bataille d'Alger* and *La vraie Bataille d'Alger* depart, conflictingly, from the same basic premise – that the 'truth' of the Algerian War resides, somehow, in the body of the 'informer'. His 'star witness', insinuates Massu, remained unharmed: 'on constatera que le style de cette confession [la confession de Saadi] n'est pas celui d'un homme obligé de parler sous la contrainte'.¹⁹⁰ The F.L.N. 'turncoat' invoked in *La Bataille d'Alger* is, on the other hand, patently in pain. Emaciated, semi-naked and unshaven, he gasps convulsively through the film's opening sequence. 'Il a finalement craché le morceau', announce the soldiers, as they march him past a bloodstained wall.

This man, whose admissions seal the fate of his surviving comrades, is not, I should clarify, Saadi/Djafar. Unlike General Massu's treacherous antagonist, *La Bataille*'s first 'anti-' hero has no name, nor does he ever audibly 'name names'. Once his interrogation is over, the action shifts swiftly to the Casbah, where French troops swarm through the crowded quarters like ants, rounding up other Muslims and forcing them, hands on heads, from their homes. The few individual 'testimonies' to torment – the few close-up shots – that we are offered in these early scenes seem to echo those of Alleg, who prefaced his own diaries with the caveat, 'dans cette immense prison surpeuplée, dont chaque cellule abrite une souffrance, parler de *soi* est comme une indécence'.¹⁹¹ In *La Bataille d'Alger*, no single character will hold the spotlight; and the shivering informer

¹⁸⁸ *La Bataille d'Alger*. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. Casbah-Films. 1965. Although this film was awarded the Golden Lion at the 1966 Venice Festival, it was not granted certification by the French authorities until 1970; its release in France, therefore, pre-dated the publication of Massu's book by a mere twelve months.

¹⁸⁹ *La vraie Bataille*, p. 297.

¹⁹⁰ *La vraie Bataille*, p. 301.

¹⁹¹ *La Question*, p. 13, my emphasis.

reappears only once, to signal the location of the last, terrorist, hideout. If the object of the pre-credit frames is, in Alleg's words, '[d]'illustre[r] d'un seul exemple ce qui [était] la pratique courante dans cette guerre atroce et sanglante', the film that follows will provide a dozen more such 'histories'.¹⁹² As the Italian director, Gillo Pontecorvo, put it, 'les personnages émergeront quelques minutes dans la lumière pour être aussitôt réabsorbés par la masse.'¹⁹³

For all Massu's insistence on the flattering self-image constructed by Saadi, 'pour la postérité', *La Bataille d'Alger* was never, technically, to be any 'one man's show'. Boudjedra, ever critical, bemoaned its producers' 'proclivity for Hollywood-style spectacle' and liking for 'expensive' foreigners: tastes, he felt, which 'deprived [...] young Algerian-film-professionals-in-the-making [...] of funds, experience, and opportunity'.¹⁹⁴ In reality, however, a mere nine European technicians worked on the Algerian-Italian co-production, the intention of the Algiers-based Casbah Film Company being to 'collaborate [...] as means of training their own [...] people' 'on the spot', to 'prepare for [...] an independent [...] industry'.¹⁹⁵ The cast consisted almost entirely of amateur and un-credited *Algérois*, and even Pontecorvo had been selected from a short-list of three possible directors.¹⁹⁶ Saadi, who contributed to the script, but did not write it, took part in no more than four or five scenes. Where Massu appears, on his book's cover, in giant form, superimposed on to a panoramic shot of Algiers, *La Bataille d'Alger*, by contrast, eschews the dominance of the *auteur*. Where Massu towers over the streets of the Algerian capital, *La Bataille*, ultimately, reverses that perspective; in this film, it is place, not person, which assumes 'star' status.

MOUNTING AN ASSAULT ON FORM

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁹³ Interview with Guy Hennebelle for *Cinéma 65*, quoted in Joan Mellen, *Filmguide to the Battle of Algiers*, (London: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 11.

¹⁹⁴ *Naissance du cinéma algérien*, quoted in John D.H. Downing, 'Post-Tricolor African Cinema: Toward a Richer Vision', in *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds*, ed. Dina Sherzer, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 188-228 (p. 189).

¹⁹⁵ Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁶ The sole professional actor to appear was Jean Martin, who played the 'Massuiste' character, Colonel Mathieu. The other two directors considered were Francesco Rosi, who had prior commitments, and Luchino Visconti, who 'was not interested in the project'. (John J. Michalczyk, *The Italian Political Filmmakers* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 191.)

‘Pourquoi tout ne reviendrait-il pas à savoir qui je “hante”?’ asks André Breton, and his narrative of possession and topography is as pertinent to the Casbah Film Company’s work as it is to Kateb Yacine’s. ‘Pourquoi tout ne reviendrait-il pas à savoir qui je “hante”?’ asks Breton, and immediately regrets admitting to his own *hantise*. ‘Ce dernier mot m’égare [...] il me fait jouer de mon vivant le rôle d’un fantôme, [...] il fait allusion à ce qu’il a fallu que je cessasse d’être, pour être *qui* je suis.’¹⁹⁷ The performance by which identity is here defined, the performance of death, so to speak, in life, would also be ‘enforced’ on thousands of inhabitants of post-war Algiers. Whether drafted in as extras or actors, the *Algérois*’ submission ‘[aux] [...] contingences [...] de *lieu*’ (and history) had – like that of *Nadja*’s phantom – to be ‘aveugle’: ‘their movements were drawn with chalk on the ground’, ‘their lines [...] spoken to them just before the cameras rolled’.¹⁹⁸ The most obviously ‘spectral’ aspect of *La Bataille d’Alger* lies, perhaps, in the soft, grainy film stock; and its blanched images and telephoto shots flicker before the spectator in such convincing emulation of television reportage that some prints carry the disclaimer, ‘not one foot of newsreel has been used’.¹⁹⁹ Yet Pontecorvo’s explanation of the techniques that served to create this delusory projection ‘of the past’ seems equally adequately to describe the retrograding process which took place on the other side of the lens. *La Bataille d’Alger*, he specified, employed documentary-style *contratypes*, ‘negatives made from the positive [...] because the original [negative] has been lost’.²⁰⁰

The reconstruction entailed by the film’s climactic episode, in one sense, exemplified ‘reverse-development’, as the American critic, Joan Mellen, notes:

The only place in the crowded Casbah [of 1965] where there was enough space to construct and blow up the house of Ali La Pointe [the last F.L.N. leader to remain at large] was the site of the actual house destroyed at the end of the real battle of Algiers.²⁰¹

So, in another sense, did the casting. ‘Pour qu’il y ait du fantôme’, writes Derrida, ‘il faut un retour au corps.’²⁰² Ali La Pointe’s *fictional* or *phantom* home was built on, and using,

¹⁹⁷ *Nadja*, p. 9.

¹⁹⁸ *Nadja*, *ibid*, my italics; Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 20, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ Michalczyk, p. 190.

²⁰⁰ Joan Mellen, ‘An Interview with Gillo Pontecorvo’, *Film Quarterly* 26.1 (1972), 2-10 (p. 7).

²⁰¹ *Filmguide*, p. 20.

²⁰² *Spectres*, p. 202.

the rubble left by the terrorist's *historic* absence – on the ‘positive’, as it were, of a ‘negative’ – then destroyed again. The figures that we see populating, and later ‘perishing’ in, this building, the screen “‘actors”, [were] [...] chosen on the basis of their [...] physiognomies and physiques’, on the basis of their resemblance to the real-life activists who ‘remained’ in faded photographs alone (figures 3-4).²⁰³ *La Bataille d’Alger*, to follow Derrida’s contradictory axiom, ‘re-embodied’ the dead – through physical replication – even as it forced them, once more, outside the realm of the three-dimensional, and into the realm of the projectional. The cinematic process at work in this ‘neo-realist’ film relied, like the Derridean ‘processus spectro-gène’, on ‘une *incorporation paradoxale*’; it re-‘engendered’ human pasts or ghosts, ‘en leur donnant du corps, [...] mais [...] un *autre corps artefactuel, un corps prothétique*, [...] on pourrait dire un fantôme de fantôme’.²⁰⁴

Spectres de Marx, indeed, offers more than one apposite ‘take’ on the riddle of dis-incarnation. The phantom, an occult cousin to the look-alike, eludes morphology. ‘La chair et la phénoménalité,’ Derrida observes, ‘voilà ce qui donne à l’esprit son apparition spectrale, mais disparaît aussitôt dans l’apparition, dans la venue même du revenant’. And the same could be said of the celluloid ‘bodies’ that ‘flesh out’ the contours of *La Bataille d’Alger*, bodies that are not bodies, bodies that are no longer anything bar the appearance of body. There is, as *Spectres* concludes, ‘du disparu dans l’apparition même comme réapparition du disparu’.²⁰⁵ The entrance of the *revenant*, whether cinematic or supernatural, marks a moment of history ‘becoming-body’, yet also becoming-not-body: a moment of epistemological incertitude that *La Bataille*, contradictorily, ‘acknowledges’ through cuts and flashbacks. Our first close-up view of the doomed Ali La Pointe cedes to a cityscape captioned ‘Alger, 1954’, drawing his features, symbolically, on to a single past scenario, yet also undoing those features, dispersing them outwards in an unusually lengthy lap-dissolve. When the same image recurs towards the end of the film, it is a fade to white which signals the a-physicality – the ‘non-present presence’ – of the human re-enactment; and over-exposure leaves Ali’s silhouette evaporating as though it were an apparition struck by sunlight.

²⁰³ Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 41. Brahim Haggiag (Ali La Pointe) was a farm worker whom ‘Pontecorvo discovered in the market place’ (Michalczyck, p. 192), and Fawzia El Kader (Hassiba ben Bouali) ‘was spotted [...] in a restaurant’ (Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 17).

²⁰⁴ Derrida, *Spectres*, pp. 202-203.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 25.

For the spectator, the effect of this second glimpse into the F.L.N. *cachette* is akin to that which Barthes evokes in contemplating the face of Lewis Payne, would-be assassin, shackled up upon ‘death row’. ‘J’observe avec horreur un futur antérieur dont la mort est l’enjeu. [...] Devant la photo, [...] je frémis [...] *d’une catastrophe qui a déjà eu lieu*’. Every photograph, he goes on, contains the germ of that catastrophe, ‘[mais elle] se lit à vif dans la photographie historique: il y a toujours [...] un écrasement du Temps: cela est mort et cela va mourir’. *La Bataille d’Alger*, in its way, exacerbates ‘ce vertige du Temps écrasé’, the impression of awed suspense, before the proofs of ‘double time’. The music, usually euphonic, degenerates into one disharmonious ‘backwards’ chord whilst a re-run of the film’s initial frames begins to freeze them, takes snap-shots from the earlier, moving, vision of *un futur antérieur*. Then, once the dust from the explosion we foresaw has settled, the French officer sends his own photographers in, to shoot amongst the wreckage. The photographic ‘referent’ which Barthes found solid – ‘la chose [...] *réelle* qui a été placée devant l’objectif’, ‘que quelqu’un a vu[e] *en chair*’ – has now lost mass, explicitly, amongst images of images, of images-in-the-making. The (re) *mise-en-scène* which film and soldiers both perform ‘compacts’ time, yes, *l’écrase*, but, *du même coup*, it alerts us: the axiom ‘Ça-a-été’ can mask *phantasma*.²⁰⁶ What Barthes sees to be history ‘seen in the flesh’ might be derivative, a copy, might have been flattened from the first.

As in *Nedjma*, however, the most sustained assault upon the integrity of any, individual, form is that precipitated by the act of torture. Where Kateb splinters the ‘internal’ experience of violence into disjunct physical pangs (‘dans les reins, aux genoux, à la cheville’), *La Bataille d’Alger* splinters the ‘external’ experience of its infliction into a series of punitive tableaux, shifting, in focus, from mouth, to torso, to head (figures 5-8). The novel’s staccato style finds a parallel, here, in the use of montage, and the film cuts rapidly from one shot, one victim – and one method – of interrogation to another: first water torture by inflation and submersion, then the blow torch, hanging, and electric shock. Chilling in their fidelity to F.L.N. testimony, these scenes point, too, to the military impassivity condemned by Alleg, who remarked, ‘[le] “centre de tri” n’était pas seulement un lieu de tortures pour les Algériens, mais une école de perversion pour les jeunes Français’.²⁰⁷ In *La Bataille*’s reconstructed prison cells, Frenchmen, inured to horror, simply stare and smoke.

²⁰⁶ *La Chambre claire*, p. 150, p. 151, p. 120, p. 124, p. 121.

²⁰⁷ *La Question*, p. 91. The methods of torture depicted here appear in similar detail in the (Algerian) accounts given in Einaudi, *La Ferme Améziane*, pp. 14-17, p. 41, pp. 52-53, and Simone de Beauvoir and

‘The one point,’ to quote Rebecca Pauly, ‘where Pontecorvo backs down from realism is in his use of the musical soundtrack, [...] cover[ing] up the victims’ screams of agony when they are being tortured’.²⁰⁸ But the motif from Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* that plays over each, graphic, performance of brutality does not merely ‘muffle’ the cry of pain; it shuts down the spoken word. *Massuisme*, in *La Bataille d’Alger*, has its proponents, and several monologues explore the rationale behind abusive practice, a practice justified, explicitly, by Colonel Mathieu:

Le F.L.N. [...] demande à chacun de ses membres qu’en cas de capture il conserve le silence pendant vingt-quatre heures, après quoi il peut parler. L’organisation a ainsi le temps nécessaire pour rendre inutilisable n’importe quel renseignement. Et nous, quelle forme d’interrogatoire devrions-nous adopter? Celui en usage dans la procédure civile, qui pour le moindre délit dure des mois?

The sentiments, moreover, are those of a complex and not unsympathetic character. Joan Mellen alludes to Mathieu’s ‘powerful and attractive’ physique, ‘convey[ing] [...] the ‘capacity to be “strong, elastic and in command”’; *Sight and Sound*’s reviewer deemed him ‘a latter day Caesar’.²⁰⁹ To the colonel’s own mind, he is, perhaps, closer to Horatio, a lover of reason, of scientific system, a ‘foil’ to chaos. His pyramidal intelligence diagrams dominate the military offices, and his message to his troops is pithy. ‘La base de [...] [notre] travail [...] est le renseignement, la méthode est l’interrogatoire, et l’interrogatoire

Gisèle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha*, pp. 20-35, p. 225. Significantly, it might be added, Roger Trinquier – an expert *advocate* of torture and veteran of Massu’s 10th Paratroopers Division – deemed the film ‘an honest representation of the battle’ and even, ‘dans un certain sens, [...] un hommage à l’Armée française’. (Michalczyk, p.199; Norbert Multeau, ‘Le cinéma et la guerre d’Algérie’, *Le Spectacle du Monde/Réalités* 241 (1982), 101-106 (p. 104).)

²⁰⁸ *The Transparent Illusion*, p. 37. This is not to suggest, however, that music need necessarily be extradiegetic to the scene of torture. Although I have found no documentation of its use during the Algerian War, music *was* played in the course of Gestapo interrogations and has been noted as a feature of some Latin American ‘intelligence’ operations. One survivor of General Pinochet’s regime in Chile, for example, testified, ‘mi hermana ya estaba desaparecida, llamaban por teléfono a mi casa y ponían una grabación del disco “Late un corazón”; se escuchaba el silbido de un hombre que se alejaba y la voz de una mujer quejándose’. (Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, *Informe de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación*, 3 vols. (Santiago: Secretaria General del Gobierno, 1991), II, p. 782 (I))

²⁰⁹ Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 17; David Wilson, ‘Politics and Pontecorvo’, *Sight and Sound* 40 (1971), 160-161 (p. 160).

devient une méthode lorsqu'il est conduit de façon à toujours obtenir une réponse.²¹⁰ For Mathieu, like Horatio, confession is the means to alleviate the torment of those possessed of unknown secrets ('If there be any [...] thing to be done/ That may to thee do ease, [...] / Speak to me', I.1. 133-135). We see him cause and *terminate* the throes of pain in equal measure. *La question*, in his philosophy, is 'simply' that of the scholar, insisting, 'speak, I charge thee speak' (I.1.55). And Mathieu's 'demand', like Horatio's, must go unanswered. 'Lifted out of time' and narrative 'logic', severed from causality, *La Bataille*'s torture sequence preserves its victims' silence.²¹¹ If much of the 'truth' of the Algerian war resides – for this film – in the body of the informer, the body coerced, the body, effectively, *eroded*, that 'truth' will also remain there. These ghosts, at least, can keep their secrets.

WHAT DOES ALGERIA WANT?

La Bataille d'Alger, in many respects, is a film 'at the edge of the universe of testimony, [...] at the frontiers of the necessity of speech'.²¹² Meticulously researched, the tiniest detail of its episodes derived from 'interviews with former paratroopers and officers in Paris, [...] [from] Arab revolutionaries, [...] guerrilla dynamiters, [...] [and] newsreel footage'.²¹³ Colonel Mathieu's views correspond closely to those expressed in Colonel Trinquier's *La Guerre moderne*; Saadi, we assume, has shaped Djafar's opinion. At the same time, it constitutes 'a paradoxical articulation of a *loss of voice*', a loss of the ability to 'tell'.

²¹⁰ The extent to which Mathieu's approach reflects 'serious' (and one presumes, carefully considered) army strategy, rather than knee-jerk authoritarianism, may be gauged both by its similarities to contemporary tactical treatises and by the response it has since elicited in military circles. A recent study by a former Ministry of Defence official notes that when the author screened *La Bataille d'Alger* at the Ministry's Joint Operation Centre during the 1980's, British Army officers present applauded the film as 'an admirably vigorous illustration of how best to combat terrorism'. (Paul Schulte, 'Interrogating Pontecorvo: The Continuing Significance and Evolving Meanings of *The Battle of Algiers*' (unpublished master's thesis, University of London, 1999), p. 71.)

²¹¹ Mellen, *ibid*, p. 52.

²¹² Shoshana Felman, 'The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*', in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 204-283 (p. 224).

²¹³ Michalczyk, p. 191.

‘The film testifies,’ as Shoshana Felman observes of *Shoah*, ‘not merely by collecting and by gathering fragments of witnessing, but by actively exploding any possible enclosure – any conceptual frame – that might claim to *contain* the fragments and to fit them into one coherent whole’.²¹⁴ Pontecorvo’s declared aim was to ‘make a film without any meaning’; his working title, the biblical *A Birth in Sorrow*, intended to show solely ‘[that] the birth of a nation happens with pain on both sides’.²¹⁵ For all the director’s well-known Marxist sympathies, he would, emphatically, refute the accusation of didacticism. ‘I don’t believe that when people fight, some fight hard and some fight less hard. The Algerians [...] also committed torture. You must judge who is [...] condemned and who is right’.²¹⁶

Whilst ‘theory’, in this context, is arguably a misnomer, what emerges from Pontecorvo’s comments is nonetheless something approaching Dominick LaCapra’s conception of ‘working-through’. To ‘work through’, the latter explains, is, theoretically, to choose a median way between the teleology of ‘master narratives’ and the pathological ‘construction of *all* history as trauma’:

Theory in this sense would prompt an attempt to combine criticism and self-criticism with a practice of articulation that would resist redemptive totalization. It would not deny the irreducibility of loss or the role of paradox and aporia. But instead of becoming compulsively fixated on or symptomatically reinforcing impasses, it would engage a process of mourning that would attempt, however self-questioningly and haltingly, to specify its haunting objects and (even if only symbolically) to give them a “proper” burial.²¹⁷

Nedjma, I suggested, sets the stage for a first, tentative, ‘return of the repressed’. In Kateb’s novel, the subjects of colonialism find themselves ‘possessed’ by the trauma of its imposition, sentenced to replay the abjection of their own pasts as well as those of others, numbed by the incursion of violence into time and reason. The span of the work is the space of incubation, its impact, that of the delayed ‘realization’ of atrocities too shattering to be ‘fully known’. *La Bataille d’Alger* takes us into a second unsettling dimension of *Nachträglichkeit* or ‘belatedness’: a dimension in which the ‘repetition

²¹⁴ ‘The Return of the Voice’, p. 224, p. 223.

²¹⁵ Mellen, ‘An Interview with Gillo Pontecorvo’, p. 3, p. 4.

²¹⁶ Quoted in Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 24. Pontecorvo had, in fact, himself taken part in guerrilla activities as a leader in the (far-left) Milanese Resistance movement during World War II. Although he terminated his fifteen-year membership of the Italian Communist Party in 1956, he remained on ‘friendly’ terms with the organization (Michalczyk, p. 183).

²¹⁷ *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 193 (my emphasis).

compulsion', as LaCapra puts it, co-exists with an awareness of the historical possibility – and national actuality – of 'self-liberation'. The Freudian process of 'acting-out' persists, here, in the modified form that he likens to a rite of 'mourning', 'where grief is repeated', but simultaneously 'reduced, normatively controlled, socially supported', brought, stumblingly, into *focus*.²¹⁸

The pursuit of Algeria's independence, as Pontecorvo points out, entailed atrocities on the part of the Algerians and the French alike. The F.L.N., announced a 1956 communiqué quoted in *La Bataille d'Alger*, would assume responsibility for 'la santé physique et morale du peuple algérien', extirpating '[les] vices dégradants de beaucoup de nos frères et sœurs'. For those 'brothers and sisters' who defied its moral authority, the penalties would be harsh: 'Les contravenants seront punis. Les récidivistes seront punis de la peine de mort'. Early scenes in the film, accordingly, depict the one-time delinquent Ali La Pointe 'cautioning' an addled *kif*-smoker and executing his (unarmed) former street comrade, Hacene, for infringing the nationalist ban on drugs, alcohol and prostitution and refusing to work for the party.²¹⁹ Nor does *La Bataille* spare us the minutiae of terrorist attacks on *pied noir* civilians. In one incident, white settlers are gunned down indiscriminately by Muslims firing from an ambulance; and what is, perhaps, the film's most sickeningly gripping episode details the detonation of three 'no-warning' bombs within the European district: at the Air France terminal, in a crowded café, in a teenage 'milk bar'.

Despite the even-handedness of its approach to terror, *La Bataille d'Alger* does, clearly, differentiate between the causes it delineates. The 'haunting objects' of the narrative – Pontecorvo's problematic 'who is right' – are unquestionably the defeated nationalists; the 'symbolic' memorial service accorded them, the film's 1960 coda. In this final scene, spontaneous demonstrations flood the streets of Algiers, breaking past tanks, out of the Casbah. A French policeman shouts to the crowd, 'Qu'est-ce que vous voulez?' and his officers are almost trampled in the surge forward. *La Bataille* closes with the image of a flag-waving woman, dancing to the prematurely muted strains of 'the musical theme we have come to identify with Ali La Pointe' – a 'half-rendition' repeated, over a blank

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 193, p. 199.

²¹⁹ *La vraie Bataille d'Alger* cites a further directive, 'Boycottez les cigarettes qui font la fortune des colons', and contains a number of hospital photographs illustrating the punishment meted out to Muslims who ignored this command. Accompanying the photographs are the words, '1^{re} sanction pour désobéissance: 5.000 F. En cas de récidive: Égorgement ou nez coupé.' (Plates inserted into Part III, 'Documents à l'appui', pp. 331-335.)

screen, after the credits.²²⁰ And in aurally evoking the dead at the very moment in which it seems to proclaim the autonomy of the living, the film, one might contend, overdetermines the last, spoken, query, conflating ‘what Algeria wants’, with ‘what Algeria is wanting’ or *lacking*. The festive ‘wake’, in other words, returns us to a question that is as implicit in the earlier spiral of anti-colonial violence as it is in the director’s ‘gloss’: the question, to quote LaCapra, ‘of the interaction between compulsion’ – the traumatic absence of ‘knowledge’ – ‘and responsible agency or choice’.²²¹

Freud, from whom LaCapra takes his terminology of ‘working-through’, provides the following definition of repetition compulsion:

[The subject] does not *remember* anything of what [...] has [been] forgotten or repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory, but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.²²²

It is, in a sense, an appropriate description of the mechanisms at work in *La Bataille d’Alger*, a film that relies, for its impact, on the bodily gestures of Algerians who had, for the most part, no cognizance of the actual battle.²²³ A film that refuses, in any case, to integrate the most pained of those gestures – the most clandestine of the war’s ‘horrors’ – into its chronologically marked cycle of victory and defeat. In another sense, however, *La Bataille* seeks to reclaim the agency *in* action that is missing from the Freudian hypothesis at this stage. If it stops short of Fanon’s intimation that ‘la violence [...] débarrasse le colonisé de son complexe d’infériorité [...] le réhabilite à ses propres yeux’, there is, notwithstanding, a suggestion that the *re-enactment* of violence may allow the colonized a share, at least, in the architecture of his own history.²²⁴ By ‘working through’ apparently incomprehensible events within the broader context of political change, the film, it seems, ‘conjoins trauma with the possibility of the retrieval of desirable’ – or

²²⁰ Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 25.

²²¹ *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 175.

²²² ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. & trans. James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth, 1956-1974), XII: *The Case of Schreber; Papers on Technique, and Other Works* (1958), pp. 147-156 (p. 150).

²²³ The obvious exception, here, is Saadi. The absence of other ‘real-life’ combatants was, Pontecorvo explained, due to the changing complexion of Algiers’ population: by 1965, the majority of the original inhabitants of the Casbah had moved into the former European quarters, leaving their old homes to migrants from the countryside. (Mellen, ‘An Interview with Gillo Pontecorvo’, p. 4.)

²²⁴ *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 127.

previously ‘unactualized’ – ‘aspects of the past’ that could help to ‘counteract’ trauma; and specifically, with the possibility of Algerian independence.²²⁵

In so doing, *La Bataille d’Alger* also, in many ways, points us towards the ‘retrieval’ of something hitherto excluded from cinematic, as much as historical, ‘memory’. Like the French works discussed earlier, the Italian-Algerian co-production reflects a particular system of geographical and spatial apartheid: in this case, concretely, ‘le monde colonial [...] compartimenté, [...] coupé en deux’ described by Fanon, ‘[dont] la ligne de partage [...] est indiquée par les casernes et les postes de police’.²²⁶ Unlike the French works, it pursues the fortunes of men and women on both sides of the barbed wire fence. *Le Boucher*, *Muriel* et al, contradictorily, ‘police’ the very boundaries to whose existence their protagonists attest, fixating on a break-down of language which precludes informed exchange with either the past or the racial ‘other’. These, in the terms of LaCapra’s argument, are narratives that ‘symptomatically stay within trauma’, ‘acting out a repetition compulsion with its fragmentation or fracturing’ of all hope, ‘all possibilities of bonding and renewal’; *la volonté*, for the repatriated veteran, is always, as it were, *hors de question*.²²⁷ *La Bataille d’Alger*, on the other hand, restores visibility to the shadowy, intertextual, ‘fringes’ of ‘trip-wire’ filmmaking, allowing the veterans’ Algerian victims – the detainees, the tortured, the ‘disappeared’ – to take centre stage, and granting *them* the benefit of the inquiry that French cinema did not make: ‘qu’est-ce que vous voulez?’

BEYOND THE SCREEN

‘Le cinéma’, claims Derrida, ‘est un deuil magnifique, un travail du deuil magnifié, [...] il est prêt à se laisser impressionner par toutes les mémoires endeuillées’.²²⁸ Elsewhere, he has defined this work of mourning as ‘un travail de type “psychoanalytique”’; as an effort that exceeds the realm of discourse, and the grasp of conscious minds.

Il faut la prise de conscience, il faut travailler [...] à dire, à voir, à se rappeler thématiquement, consciemment, mais en sachant qu’un autre travail [...] est en cours. Ce travail, c’est un labeur qui passe par l’inconscient, par des rapports de forces, [...] [qui] se passe ailleurs, à des rythmes que nous ne

²²⁵ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 199, p. 175, p. 199.

²²⁶ *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 68.

²²⁷ *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 195.

²²⁸ De Baecque and Jousse, p. 78.

contrôlons pas, par rapport auxquels nous ne devons pas être passifs. Mais qui impliquent malgré tout, au plus fort de notre activité, une espèce de passivité.²²⁹

The strange conjunction, here, of proactivity and passivity, of *laisser-faire*, *laisser-agir* despite the self (*le moi veillé*), is one that holds together, too, across the frames of Algeria's 'first movie'. *La Bataille d'Alger*, tenably, is an exemplar of reiteration 'with a difference', of critical purchase on recent loss: the film, like Kateb's *Nedjma*, inscribes the here, the now, alongside the 'there', the then. Yet for all that, the reconstruction of a battle which had seen some 'forty' percent of the Casbah's men arrested still bears suspicious traces of the un-thought and the un-sought, of rhythms that the filmmakers did not quite control.²³⁰ It remains difficult to identify a *fully* 'effective process of working-through in a posttraumatic context in which agency cannot [...] be assumed but must', as LaCapra remarks, 'be reconstituted'.²³¹

For Freud himself, 'controlled repetition' was something of a cloudy notion: he makes, to quote Laplanche and Pontalis, scarcely any attempt to correlate 'le concept de perlaboration à ceux de remémoration et de répétition, [...] [mais] il semble qu'il s'agisse d'un troisième terme où les deux autres viendraient se rejoindre'.²³² There are instants, in *La Bataille d'Alger*, when the line between teleology and aporia becomes perilously fine. 'I have', announced Saadi, 'substituted the camera for the machine gun. [...] We desired to make an objective, equilibrated film, [...] not a trial of a people or of a nation, but [...] [an] accusation against [...] violence and war'.²³³ Given some of the film's content, one might query the ease with which the vanquished nationalist re-invents himself, here, as an agent of, or for, 'considered' pacifism, as well as the reasoning behind the substitution he proposes. In staging a final 'expression of the will to freedom' – an uprising 'dont on ne connaît pas le motif' – *La Bataille*, it could be contended, arbitrarily or *mystically* undercuts its earlier, harrowing, explorations of what it might 'mean' (and not 'mean') to exist without a sense of collective human agency.²³⁴ And certainly, in assigning an active role in anti-colonial brutality to some of those whose suffering it later removes from 'straight

²²⁹ Derrida and Stiegler, pp. 151-152.

²³⁰ Horne, p. 199.

²³¹ *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 194.

²³² *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, p. 306.

²³³ Igor Film (Rome) publicity material, quoted in Michalczyck, p. 195.

²³⁴ Mellen, *Filmguide*, p. 65.

cut' 'reality' – notably, Ali La Pointe – *La Bataille* has, in practice, laid itself open to charges of revolutionary hagiography.²³⁵

Indeed, it is the reception accorded to this docu-drama that perhaps points up the gravest risk entailed in any, attempted, 'working-through': the risk that the process of invocation may 'get out of control and not only reinscribe but,' as LaCapra accepts, 'intensify fragmentation and disorientation'.²³⁶ One can begin to lay the ghosts of certain crimes to rest; one cannot, entirely, avoid the inclination to repeat. *Le concept de perlaboration*, to rephrase Laplanche and Pontalis's line, is implicated in, and indissoluble from, the kinesics of acting-out, not simply memory. The encounter with trauma it implies is not transcendent, the disengagement from historic losses, never final. When *La Bataille d'Alger* first reached French screens in 1970, the film was, almost immediately, 'retiré des affiches par les distributeurs [...] en conséquence des manifestations hostiles et souvent violentes qui se sont produites, sous l'impulsion des associations d'anciens combattants et de pied-noirs rapatriés'.²³⁷ Eleven years later, notes John Michalczyk, the hostility continued.

On 7 January 1981, a polemic film festival began at the St. Séverin cinema house in Paris's Latin Quarter. It featured films made about the Algerian struggle for independence [...] [including] *La Bataille d'Alger*. [...] The theatre was firebombed [...] – some say [by the] OAS – just a few days after the programme began. For the rest of the festival the lobby bore traces of the attack.²³⁸

²³⁵ A particularly vociferous critic, in this respect, has been the American Pauline Kael, who calls *La Bataille d'Alger* 'the one great revolutionary sell of modern times' and Pontecorvo, 'the most dangerous kind of poet, a Marxist poet' (*Reeling* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 114). Elsewhere, she lambasts the film for the insidiousness of its 'historical-determinist message', commenting, 'people's senses are so overwhelmed by the surging inevitability of the action that they are prepared to support what in another context – such as newsprint – they would reject. It's practically rape of the doubting intelligence.' (*The New Yorker*, 19 November 1973, quoted in Schulte, p. 69.)

²³⁶ *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 221.

²³⁷ Philip Dine, 'Trois regards étrangers: *Les Oliviers de la justice* de James Blue, *La Bataille d'Alger* de Gillo Pontecorvo, *Les Centurions* de Mark Robson', *CinémAction*, 85 (1997), 80-86 (p. 85).

²³⁸ *The Italian Political Filmmakers*, pp. 190-191. The O.A.S. (Organisation Armée Secrète) was the main 'loyalist' terrorist group active during the latter half of the Algerian War and the mastermind behind a series of 'anti-independence' operations that included assassination attempts on both Mitterrand and De Gaulle. *La Bataille d'Alger* has, I should add, also been linked to – and even held responsible for – 'paramilitary' violence in other parts of the world. In one trial in New York, claims Charles Glass, 'the prosecution [...] presented the film as evidence against thirteen Black Panthers on the grounds they had used it as a training manual in guerrilla tactics'. ('The Hour of the Birth of Death: Pontecorvo's Long Silence and the Demise

In Algeria, by contrast, *La Bataille* broke box-office records and, initially, elicited rapturous responses from audiences both inside and outside the capital. Boumediene's government, inspired by the success of a film that (although privately financed) had been made with its approval, 'poured a great deal of its [own] film budget until the mid-1970s into making films about the anticolonial struggle'.²³⁹ With time, however, the same brutally sanctioned culture of anti-individualism that had come to pervade 'official' literature seemed to erode the reputation of 'la première grande production algérienne'. By the year of the St. Séverin bombing, *La Bataille d'Alger* would find itself subject to criticisms from *Algerians* which echoed those of Jacques Massu; and above all, to the charge that it had, somehow, erred in its '[construction] d'un personnage de héros national', valorizing the living at the expense of the dead.²⁴⁰ The sociologist Mostefa Lacheraf, to give but one example, complained (as Massu had done) that Larbi Ben M'Hidi, a leading light in the 1950s' nationalist movement, was sidelined. War 'criminals', he lamented, had been presented 'sous les traits, le comportement et les manières [des] [...] grand[s] seigneur[s]', 'alors que l'on prête à [...] [ce] future et courageuse victime [des] [...] parachutistes, le rôle d'un théoricien à lunettes, [...] inexpressif, épisodique et marginal'.²⁴¹ This 'theoretician' was not, perhaps, the only slighted figure. In the chapter that follows, I shall turn my attention to a second kind of combatant whose role, and destiny, *La Bataille* to some extent plays down: the female activist.

of Political Film-making', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 June 1998, pp. 20-21 (p. 20).) Rebecca Pauly, similarly, notes, 'the leftist pro-Arab nature of *La Bataille d'Alger* has led to its use by the Palestine Liberation Organization. [...] For [this] group, the film has [...] a lot of valuable technical information about the organization of a terrorist movement.' (*The Transparent Illusion*, p. 33.)

²³⁹ Downing, 'Post-Tricolor African Cinema', p. 189.

²⁴⁰ Benjamin Stora and Mouny Berrah, 'La guerre d'Algérie à l'écran: filmographies', *CinémAction*, 85 (1997), 186-240 (p. 226).

²⁴¹ Article for *CinémAction*, 14 (1981), quoted in Stora and Berrah, *ibid.*

3

ASSIA DJEBAR, SPEAKING TO THE LIVING DEAD

Je suis là moi, l'auteur, non, l'imitateur, qui suit en boitillant la même route [que le personnage]; je m'efforce de me couler contre elle pour mieux la surprendre, ou la trahir. Et si j'avais plus de talent, ou si je [la] percevais mieux, [...] ce ne seraient pas ses yeux seuls qui me tiendraient [...] mais également sa part d'ombre, son être inversé, son attente.

Assia Djébar, *Les Alouettes naïves*

In the novel that bears her name, Nedjma rarely talks; scarcely thinks. We are given one brief insight into her psyche, one tirade against conjugal imprisonment, tempered by the admission of promiscuity and power, '*ils m'ont [...] isolée en me mariant. ... Puisqu'ils m'aiment, je les garde dans ma prison ... À la longue, c'est la prisonnière qui décide*' (p. 67). Elsewhere, she features largely as a vision of masculine desire, a collage of reflective surfaces, '[des] seins [qui] se dressent' (p. 67), 'des blancheurs de fonderie, où le soleil martèle jusqu'au cœur' (pp. 78-79). Despite her taciturnity, however, Kateb's phantasm has become the most celebrated – and in recent years, arguably the most controversial – figure in Maghrebian fiction. Her 'speech', to quote Shakespeare on his own silenced heroine, Ophelia, may be 'nothing, / Yet the unshaped use of it doth move the hearers to collection. They [...] botch the words up fit to their own thoughts' (IV.5.7-10). For *Nedjma's* admirers, she articulates the promise, as well as the absence, of national renewal, the persistence, as well as the dissolution, of an extra-colonial *ailleurs*. For its detractors, she is, like Hamlet's reified 'beloved', incidental to the drama of sovereignty. 'Nedjma', claims the novel's dustjacket, 'c'est l'objet d'un amour d'enfance, c'est la femme éternelle, c'est l'Algérie. Nedjma, c'est l'obsession du passé, la quête de l'inaccessible, la

résurrection d'un peuple. Nedjma, c'est la femme-patrie.²⁴² 'Nedjma', writes the critic Naget Khadda, 'plus que femme est idole au sens propre du terme'.²⁴³

More than anything, perhaps, Nedjma constitutes a paradigm against which other Algerian depictions of femininity are measured, or approved. 'Contrairement à Nedjma', observe Monique Carcaud Macaire and Jeanne-Marie Clerc, 'les héroïnes d'Assia Djébar sont des femmes de chair et de sang, [...] le féminin n'est plus, chez Assia, comme il l'était chez Kateb, une "métaphore", il est une ligne de force, de résistance'.²⁴⁴ The title of their article, too, is telling: 'De l'Algérie comme mythe féminin à l'histoire des femmes algériennes. De Kateb Yacine à Assia Djébar'. *Nedjma*, in this analysis, inhabits the pre-history not of armed rebellion, but of a revolution in female self-elucidation. Its protagonist is an Eve who must be de-mystified, indeed, disclaimed, if women's inheritance is to be recognized and assumed as more than the sum of a man's spare parts. Within the schema of literary progress that Carcaud Macaire and Clerc construct, 'Nedjma' operates, effectively, as short-hand for an order of representation 'subtended' (in the Irigarayan formula) by *indifférence sexuelle*; for a narrative of masculine identity which can ghost-write femininity only in its own clouded image.²⁴⁵ There is to their minds, as to Khadda's, 'point d'autonomie [...] existentielle reconnue à la femme dans l'œuvre katebienne'.²⁴⁶

Assia Djébar, the best-known female author to emerge from Algeria, has, it would seem, laid the ground for such assessments.²⁴⁷ In a 1990 interview cited by the French academics she remarks, 'certains ont voulu peut-être devenir les enfants de Kateb. Mais pas moi, je suis une femme dont la filiation est autre'.²⁴⁸ Djébar's endeavour, Jeanne-

²⁴² 1981 printing.

²⁴³ 'Sur le personnage féminin dans le roman algérien de langue française', in *Visions du Maghreb: Montpellier, 18-23 novembre 1985*, ed. Cultures et Peuples de la Méditerranée, (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1987), pp. 142-148 (p. 146).

²⁴⁴ 'De l'Algérie comme mythe féminin à l'histoire des femmes algériennes. De Kateb Yacine à Assia Djébar', *Europe*, 76 (1998), 122-141 (p. 140).

²⁴⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 70.

²⁴⁶ 'Sur le personnage féminin', p. 146.

²⁴⁷ Djébar, it should be added, was also for many years the *only* published Algerian female writer. Even today, as Monique Gadant points out, 'elle reste la seule [...] à être l'auteur d'une *œuvre* (c'est-à-dire quelqu'un dont la finalité soit la littérature et ne soit pas un(e) écrivain(e) épisodique)'. (*Le Nationalisme algérien et les femmes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), p. 270.)

²⁴⁸ Interview with Thoria Smati, *Algérie Actualité*, 29 March – 4 April 1990 (Carcaud Macaire and Clerc, p. 122).

Marie Clerc extrapolates, is to break down ‘la sépulture tribale’ which shadowed *Nedjma*, to lift ‘[cette] claustration imposée’. *Chez elle* ‘[se] fait entendre [...] [la] parole [...] [d’une] génération [...] dont la découverte d’identité est étroitement liée à la participation à l’Histoire vécue activement, [...] non plus *subie*’.²⁴⁹ And certainly, the *Algérienne*’s own relationship to history has been different from the one that scarred Kateb Yacine. Too young to protest at Sétif, she was studying in Sèvres, far from trouble, at the outbreak of the war: ‘je n’ai jamais connu les horreurs de la guerre [...] je ne les ai jamais eues sous les yeux concrètement’. When she did return to Africa, some years later, it was to work as a reporter for the nationalist newspaper, *El Moudjahid*, conducting interviews amongst the activists and sympathisers who had sought asylum, in thousands, in Tunisia. These interviews would form the basis of the novel I read here, the 1967 text Djébar called ‘un regard [...] à partir des frontières’, *Les Alouettes naïves*.²⁵⁰

Les Alouettes, in fact, may be deemed a glance ‘over the border’ in more than the geographic sense of the word. I preface my discussion with an account of the real-life Muslim women whose battle ‘action’, hailed by Fanon, came to be dubbed *la stratégie-femme*: women driven, after victory, back behind the household threshold, back to drudgery, to labour in domestic ‘cells’. It is their experience – their view – of conflict that lends Djébar an optic on the newly surgent nation, which diverges from Kateb’s. Her characters, I shall suggest, are in many respects wraithlike. But her focus is not simply on the spectre asseverating, in *Hamlet*’s words, ‘Mark me’ (I.5.2). She highlights the mechanics of this ‘dreaded’ apparition, the misty hinges and the plating that encapsulates the shade. What is at issue, in her story, is the question which Derrida would claim subsequently as a fulcrum for *Spectres de Marx*; the ‘question of sexual difference [which] commands everything [...] said [there] [...] and, especially, [...] [the question of] the “visor”’. That expression, he glosses, is his trope for asymmetrical perspective, for a certain ‘sight’ by the unseen. “L’effet de visière”, [...] ce que du moins j’ai ainsi surnommé, c’est que, levé ou baissé, le heaume du roi, du père de Hamlet, rappelle que son regard peut voir sans être vu.’²⁵¹ The ‘visor’, in short, reminds us that ‘our’ blindness to (an)other being – and implicitly, to women, not just ghosts – cannot be taken as proof of their exit, however dark the stage might look.

²⁴⁹ Assia Djébar: *écriture, transgresser, résister* (Paris: L’Harmattan. 1997), p. 6 (my emphasis).

²⁵⁰ *Cahiers d’Études Maghrébines*, 2 (1990), quoted in Clerc, *ibid*, p. 89, p. 90.

²⁵¹ ‘Marx and Sons’, p. 231; Derrida and Stiegler, p. 137.

There is, of course, a second paradox about the eye-shield the king wears: that a spirit should have or need a 'frame' of such mundane construction, a helm, a 'cap' and arms. The reference, in Shakespeare, would appear to solve a problem of purely practical dimensions. How could one show up an 'intangible' except by dint of costume; how could one 'cast' a phantom without any props at all? Though Assia Djébar and Jacques Derrida deal in 'scripts' never intended for actors, their dilemma, in the long run, is the same. 'Hauntology', in a way, is a carapace for ephemera, a linguistic 'mantle' for the traits which black and white does not record. Yet the French thinker whose concerns most closely parallel Djébar's interest in articulating 'fogged' spaces, in tenanting the 'in-between' (between corporeity and incorporeity, between shield and shielded) is not Derrida, it is Luce Irigaray. For both women, as Djébar acknowledges, the 'scaffolding' and artifices that 'signal' ghosts in (cultural) theatres are also aids the feminine requires to enter language, to find an audience, find crowds:

Il s'agit de [...] redonner la vie à [la mère qui a été immolée], à notre mère en nous et entre nous, [...] [de] lui redonner droit à la parole. [...] [Et] nous avons à découvrir un langage qui ne substitue pas au corps à corps, ainsi qui tente de le faire la langue paternelle, mais qui l'accompagne, des paroles qui ne barrent pas le corporel, mais qui parlent corporel.²⁵²

The phantom animating *Les Alouettes*, in other words, is not the *va-et-vient* of murdered patriarchs, but maternal 'revenance'. Irigaray takes Clytemnestra as her exemplar of sovereignty snuffed out, '[une] première maison, [un] premier amour', '[un] *placenta*' disavowed by the son for the sake of some fresh 'order'.²⁵³ Djébar speaks of 'Antigone[s]', 'Iphigénie[s] de l'Algérie actuelle', of sacrifices to good governance and success in war, of daughters made mothers, in death, to a new – improved – state. And the project that I address as (a) re-cognition of *la stratégie-femme* consists in rescuing these figures for an instant from the silence of their tombs, their 'trou[s] de mémoire'; in lending them a language *pour parler corporel*, a 'visor(ed)' substitute for the body that might testify *to* the body, to its injuries, its immolation, its negation.²⁵⁴ That body is, as Carcaud Macaire and Clerc say, as Irigaray indicates, mostly female. It is not, I contend, exclusively so. The atrocities commemorated in *Nedjma*, in *La Bataille*, in *Les Alouettes*,

²⁵² Irigaray, *Sexes et parentés* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 30-31, quoted in Djébar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent ... en marge de ma francophonie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), pp. 146-147.

²⁵³ *Sexes et parentés*, p. 26, p. 27 (my italics).

²⁵⁴ Djébar, *Ces voix*, p. 143, p. 140.

would find unpleasant echoes in the civil strife that gripped Algeria in the 1990s; and the 'living dead' who stumbled, fitfully, through Djébar's fiction came to count *Algériens*, as well as *Algériennes*, among their number, men, as well as women, amongst their ranks.

LA STRATÉGIE-FEMME (I)

For Frantz Fanon, writing in 1959, the path to Algeria's liberation was also the route to woman's emancipation. Its ingress onto the international stage would mark – and had marked – her 'entrée dans l'histoire'.²⁵⁵ 'La femme', he wrote, 'ne fait pas que tricoter ou pleurer le soldat. La femme algérienne est au cœur du combat. Arrêtée, torturée, violée, abattue, elle atteste de la violence de l'occupant et de son inhumanité.'²⁵⁶ Colonial brutality had wrought the transformation that colonial 'enlightenment' could not: it had wrenched Muslim women from domesticity and seclusion and pushed them to public action, public abjection. 'La société féminine', Fanon surmised, 'se modifie [...] par solidarité organique avec la Révolution, [...] parce que l'adversaire taille dans la chair algérienne [*toute* chair algérienne] avec une violence inouïe'.²⁵⁷ By the time the 'revolution' was over, the F.L.N., it appeared, had come to share his sense of progress. The 1962 Charter of Tripoli proclaimed, 'La participation de la femme algérienne à la lutte de libération a créé des conditions favorables pour [...] l'associer d'une manière pleine et entière aux affaires publiques et au développement du pays.'²⁵⁸ Two years later, a second Algerian government renewed the pledge: 'La guerre [...] a permis à la femme algérienne de s'affirmer et de prendre aux côtés de l'homme des responsabilités. [...] L'égalité de l'homme et de la femme doit s'inscrire dans les faits'.²⁵⁹

Where parity of participation in the war effort was concerned, however, the 'facts' remained elusive. Of the two thousand or so women who had opted to defy tradition and (in many cases) parental authority by joining the *maquis*, some 42% would serve as

²⁵⁵ *Sociologie d'une révolution*, p. 93.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 50.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 103, p.106.

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Gadant, p. 135.

²⁵⁹ 1964 Charter of Algiers, quoted in Gadant, *ibid*.

nurses, whilst another 44% spent their guerrilla years as cooks and laundresses.²⁶⁰ The *moudjabidate* who lined up in newspaper photographs and early F.L.N. portraits were fighters in name alone; for the most part female volunteers were not even armed.²⁶¹ After 1958, moreover, the young militant of Fanon's *An V de la Révolution algérienne*, '[la] fille [...] qui couche dans les forêts, [...] qui parcourt le *djebel* habillée en homme', was, effectively, to be decommissioned.²⁶² Hundreds of *maquisardes* found themselves 'transferred' to neighbouring Muslim countries, lodged with host families, then encouraged to forego the rigours of military service in favour of civilian life. Nfissa, the rural 'rebel' depicted in Djébar's *Les Alouettes naïves*, ends her tour of duty – appositely – in Tunis, where marriage and maternity will ensure that she subsists, in the eyes of former colleagues, only as 'une image de passagère'.²⁶³

Amongst the activists of the urban *vilayas*, and especially Algiers, events were to take a different turn. As the 1950's progressed, Trinquier's doctrine of 'total warfare' left the capital's Muslims sealed inside the walls of their *medina*, cowed by an army whose intent was not to 'disperse' the enemy, but to destroy 'la totalité [de ses] organisations'.²⁶⁴ Under these conditions, nationalist advances would no longer be determined by territorial gain. They were measured, instead, in human casualties. 'Blind' terror had produced 'blind' terrorism; and terrorism required new, more insidious, irregulars. Zohra Drif, arrested alongside Yacef Saadi in 1957, was later to explain,

²⁶⁰ Danièle-Djamila Amrane-Minne, 'La Femme Algérienne et la guerre de libération nationale (1954-1962)', quoted in Gadant, p. 84. The occupational restrictions placed on Algerian *maquisardes* were not, it should be pointed out, unique to the F.L.N.; nor were they particular to Muslim independence movements of the period. Women who volunteered to assist the (largely Christian) Ibo secessionists during the 1967-1970 Biafra War found themselves similarly treated by the rebel leadership in eastern Nigeria. As the female protagonist of Chinua Achebe's 'Girls at War' put it, 'I left my school to go and join the militia. [...] They told me to go back to my school or join the Red Cross'. (*Girls at War and other stories*, African Writers, 100 (London: Heinemann, 1972) pp. 98-118 (p. 100).)

²⁶¹ Amrane-Minne, who makes this point on the basis of her own interviews with ex-*maquisardes*, qualifies the observation: 'cela était dû plus au manque d'armes qu'à un interdit'. A few women, she adds, did have small revolvers for defensive purposes. (*Des femmes dans la guerre d'Algérie: Entretiens* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1994), p. 32).

²⁶² *Sociologie d'une révolution*, p. 94. The term *djebel* may be translated (loosely) as 'mountains'.

²⁶³ *Les Alouettes naïves* (Paris: Julliard, 1967; repr. Paris: Actes Sud, 1997), p. 290.

²⁶⁴ *La Guerre*, p. 189.

La Casbah était quadrillée, les frères auraient été immobilisés si nous n'avions pas été là. Nous vivions la même vie, mais sur le plan de l'activité, nous avions une vie plus intense qu'eux parce que nous pouvions nous déplacer voilées. C'est eux qui se trouvaient cloîtrés.²⁶⁵

Female operatives, as Drif signals, might profit from the camouflage afforded by everyday costume in a way that men could not. Some, like her, sheltered behind a *haïk*, their hands (reassuringly) exposed, 'la bombe, [...] ou le sac de grenades retenu au corps par tout un système de ficelles et de courroies'.²⁶⁶ Others followed European fashions, concealing any 'tell-tale' equipment in the obligatory handbag, and passing almost unnoticed at colonial checkpoints. *La femme-arsenal* became a familiar feature in F.L.N. offensives: women, it has been calculated, planted two thirds of the delayed-action bombs that would detonate in the course of the war.²⁶⁷

Fanon, accordingly, made city partisans the standard-bearers for his 'universal' revolution. Algeria's female terrorists, he implied, did not simply equal their enfranchised counterparts in competence; they surpassed them in commitment. 'Il n'y a pas chez elle[s] cette sensation de jouer un rôle [...] aperçu au cinéma, [...] ce coefficient [...] d'imitation présent [...] chez une Occidentale'.²⁶⁸ It was, for all that, to be a cinematic re-enactment that would ultimately popularize women's contribution to the war, 'immortalizing' the so-called *stratégie-femme*. In *La Bataille d'Alger*, *Algéroises* carry all three F.L.N. bombs, and Ali la Pointe is armed for his first assassination by a fugitive veiled figure. What the film does not detail is the punishment such women suffered at the hands of the French. Research indicates that one in two would, in fact, be arrested; and the testimonies transcribed by the oral historian Djamila-Danièle Amrane-Minne seem almost to 'voice over' Pontecorvo's mutest scenes. 'Ils m'ont torturée à la baignoire, [...] les mains et les pieds attachées', '[avant] les exécutions [...] on entendait crier le chahid: Allahou Akbar', 'il y avait un tableau noir [...] je suis entrée, ils ont coché mon nom'.²⁶⁹ In the screen version of these stories, the prisoner, by contrast, is always male.

Yet there is, in *La Bataille d'Alger*, a cell of Algerian construction that stays open to the female activist. Ali la Pointe first comes to the viewer's attention in a cramped dark hole, a *cachette* turned *cachot* that is, we already know, surrounded by soldiers. He is not alone.

²⁶⁵ Amrane-Minne, p.138.

²⁶⁶ Fanon, *Sociologie d'une révolution*, p. 45.

²⁶⁷ Amrane-Minne, p. 110.

²⁶⁸ *Sociologie d'une révolution*, p. 33.

²⁶⁹ *Des femmes*, p. 110, p. 121, p. 149.

When the camera closes in on his face, then pans out across Algiers, it leaves behind three other, crouching, shapes: a man, a child, and the film's sole *militante* fatality, the unnamed Hassiba ben Bouali. Amrane-Minne's purpose is, as it were, to recall the anonymity of this cinematic *oubliette*, to shift the focus back on to the shadows that *La Bataille*'s subsequent, lightening, dissolve makes seem opaque. And her assumption, like Djébar's, is that visions change in sombre spaces: 'l'ombre pour les prunelles accoutumées n'est que pénombre, puis clarté diffuse bientôt peuplée d'images, de fantômes, de vie ou de son semblant'.²⁷⁰ Both women, in their way, attest to a kind of 'second sight', a spectral 'sight', in the twin senses of the word; that is, the ability to see, as well as the object of the gaze. As Derrida informs us, the ghost may be invisible between its appearances, but that does not prevent him from looking 'sans être vu'.²⁷¹ As Hamlet's father informs us, he may look *at* things that we do not, be party – in his in-apparent moments – to the 'secrets of [a] prison-house' (I.5.14).

Oral history, writes one British historian, amplifies the narrative of the past 'by introducing [...] evidence from the underside': it ensures that 'the chronicle of kings [...] [takes] into its concern the life experience of ordinary people'.²⁷² In Amrane-Minne's text, the 'underside' is an intermittent feature rather than a constant trope; and the 'ordinary' person cannot easily be dissociated from the figurehead.²⁷³ Her subjects are the *sœurs-anciennes combattantes* of governmental eulogy, women (as Djébar has it) '[dont] on photographiait dans les rues [les] corps dévêtus, [les] bras vengeurs', women who comment on themselves *as images* – 'sur la photo c'est un frère qui m'a prêté son arme' (figure 9).²⁷⁴ But they are also witnesses to a reality that is *not* coterminous with the 'broadcast' spectacle. The women interviewed here – villagers, terrorists, *Algéroises*, *maquisardes* – belie the promise of a unilateral 'liberation', chanting Fanon's litany of progress *à l'inverse*. In their Algeria, to re-formulate his axiom, 'la femme-pour-l'action

²⁷⁰ *Les Alouettes naïves*, p. 125.

²⁷¹ *Spectres*, p. 26.

²⁷² Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978; rev. edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 7-8.

²⁷³ This is particularly true of Zohra Drif, whose testimony is included amongst those of rank and file activists, but who was – as Amrane-Minne acknowledges – exceptional (and exceptionally well-known) for her participation 'à la direction de la guérilla' (*Des femmes*, p. 110).

²⁷⁴ 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement', p. 54; Amrane-Minne, p. 51.

cède la place à la femme-pour-le-mariage', and autonomy is the province of a privileged few.²⁷⁵

Après l'indépendance, je n'ai pas travaillé et je n'ai pas pu militer. [...] Même mes frères, même le plus jeune avec lequel j'ai milité pendant la guerre, encourageait mon mari à ne pas me laisser sortir: "C'est fini maintenant, il ne faut pas la laisser sortir, ce n'est plus comme avant". [...] Jusqu'en 1972/3 je ne sortais pas. [...] Maintenant il (mon mari) est fatigué, [...] il me dit: "Si tu veux travailler, vas-y". Mais à cinquante ans que puis-je faire?²⁷⁶

What emerges from the dimly lit interiors which Amrane-Minne (re)-visits is, precisely, the possibility that *L'An V* left occluded: the possibility that if the Algerian activist lacked the imitative 'coefficient' of her Western contemporaries, it was partly, perhaps, because she had not had the chance to go to the cinema.²⁷⁷

Les Alouettes naïves, like Amrane-Minne's *Des femmes dans la guerre d'Algérie*, takes its protagonists from various sectors of wartime society, and varying strata of nationalist 'involvement'. The *maquisarde* Nfissa is joined in the ranks of the F.L.N. by her younger sibling, the bomb-carrying Nadja, whilst two elder sisters, Houria and Zineb, remain at home; in Tunis, a French journalist – Julie – will add her voice to the chorus of expatriates. And like Amrane-Minne's work, the novel responds to a certain *historical* need for redress, a need (in the words of Marguerite Duras) to 'reverse [...] analysis and criticism. [To] make women the point of departure in judging, make darkness the point of departure in judging what men call light, make obscurity the point of departure in judging what men call clarity'.²⁷⁸ Originally, the 'alouettes' alluded to in European discourses on Algeria were traditional tribal dancers: courtesans who could, at one time, 'amass sizeable dowries' and marry, 'assuming the position of matriarchs' within their community. By the 1950's, however, 'alouette', as Clarisse Zimra points out, 'signified a native prostitute, particularly a camp follower', and Djébar's characters, too, trail in the

²⁷⁵ *Sociologie d'une révolution*, p. 93.

²⁷⁶ Amrane-Minne, p. 123.

²⁷⁷ Djébar's text, in fact, dramatizes just such a possibility, insofar as it includes an episode in which two female characters reminisce about a childhood excursion to the cinema. For the women themselves this excursion remains, poignantly, '*le plus grand événement de leur vie*'. For their family, however, the outing proved humiliating – '*on les avait reconnues. [...] Bientôt, dans un cercle d'hommes, l'un commencera[i]: "La fille telle", et un autre répondra[i]: "Oui, je l'ai vue hier soir au cinéma! ..." Honte!*' – and the 'experiment' was never to be repeated (*Les Alouettes naïves*, p. 163).

²⁷⁸ Susan Husserl-Kapit, 'An Interview with Marguerite Duras', *Signs*, 1.2. (1975), 423-434 (p. 426).

wake of men's manoeuvres, dreaming of better days.²⁷⁹ Their war, it transpires, is no 'glorious' revolution, but the back-line struggle of the basest infantry; these, implies the text, are Algeria's unheralded martyrs, '[les] vrais morts de la guerre, ceux qui demeurent dressés'.²⁸⁰

Eliciting testimony, for some historians, requires 'aids to memory': prompts – such as pictures – that may stimulate reactive recollection in an interviewee who will not, or cannot, spontaneously reminisce.²⁸¹ Amrane-Minne, one surmises, used F.L.N. portraits to ease the flow of conversation; her transcriptions, on occasion, make direct reference to the photographs that illustrate *Des femmes*. For Djébar, the 'unseen' experiences of Algerian women in the 1960's must, similarly, be approached – in Rosi Braidotti's phrase – '[by] working through the images and representations that the [...] knowing subject has created of woman as other'.²⁸² *Les Alouettes naïves* does not have plates, but it does describe the processes and biases that produced the iconography of 'Algeria at war'; the photo-journalistic angles that rendered Muslims, variously, as victims, *militantes*, *moudjahidate*. Whilst Amrane-Minne shows us publicity shots from the 'period piece' in question, Djébar includes detailed stage directions, observing where, as well as when, *eidola* would enter and individuals shrink to two dimensions. 'Les journalistes [...] arrachent à l'un, héros d'hier, ses souvenirs de combat, à l'autre, présenté comme un responsable abrité par l'anonymat, des déclarations humanitaires' (p. 224). 'Préparant la rubrique féminine du Journal, Julie pensait n'avoir affaire qu'à une "représentante d'une génération en marche!"' (p. 319).

It is, notwithstanding, the novel's structure – rather than its engagement with *metteurs en scène* – that most acutely underscores the transition between 'clarity' and 'obscurity', between spotlighted 'apparition' and off-stage 'otherworlder'. 'L'essentiel de l'action', notes Charles Bonn, 'se passe [...] dans "l'armée des frontières" qui est le *double* du maquis intérieur, mais dans laquelle se lisent beaucoup plus facilement les jeux politiques pour la prise du pouvoir à l'Indépendance'.²⁸³ His terminology could, to some extent, be deemed misleading; for what 'happens' in Tunis (and consequently occupies the greatest

²⁷⁹ 'Writing Woman: The Novels of Assia Djébar', *SubStance*, 69 (1992), 68-83 (p. 74).

²⁸⁰ *Les Alouettes naïves*, p. 449. From here on, references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

²⁸¹ Thompson, p. 204.

²⁸² 'Towards a New Nomadism: Feminist Deleuzian Tracks; or, Metaphysics and Metabolism' in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 159-185 (p. 170).

²⁸³ *Le Roman Algérien*, pp. 106-107.

portion of the narrative) is not so much ‘action’ as peroration, not so much a series of events as a series of debates, of dialogues amongst the exiles.²⁸⁴ But the asymmetrical ‘double’ is, as Bonn’s emphasis implies, a salient trope. Nfissa’s lengthy courtship outside Algeria appears unevenly ‘counterpoised’ with a far shorter sojourn – and a far shorter marriage – in the *djebel* of the opening chapters. And although ‘l’histoire de Nadja’ may indeed prove ‘[une] répétition de celle de Nfissa au début du roman’, it is a much truncated iteration of her elder sister’s story.²⁸⁵ *Les Alouettes* devotes only a few, italicized, pages to Nadja’s activism, and still fewer to her arrest.

Yet despite these disparities in presentation, the *second* term of the sororal ‘binary’ is the one that tends to be most emotive for the novel’s commentators. Nadja’s experiences on Algerian soil seem awkwardly disjunct from a narrative moulded, at that point, around the minutiae of expatriate existence; and the quasi-poetic images which express those experiences constitute a sharp diversion from the work’s otherwise ‘realist’ tone. To Bonn’s mind, however, her sporadic interjections, ‘apparemment en marge de l’action révolutionnaire, [...] dont le contrepoint est souligné par leur typographie, [...] ne sont pas un havre de l’Histoire, mais sont l’Histoire même’.²⁸⁶ To Zimra’s mind, they represent ‘a subversion of, and an alternative to, the socius,’ a radical re-formulation of the collective as it is portrayed in earlier chapters, as it shapes Nfissa.²⁸⁷ *Les Alouettes naïves*, at times, sets up Nadja almost as the exiled sister’s alter ego, binding the pair through telepathic understanding.²⁸⁸ In the critical context, she emerges, rather, as Nfissa’s spectral obverse. Whilst the latter apprehends ‘femininity’ solely in its superficialities – ‘quand une [...] femme la croisait, [...] elle croyait ne percevoir que l’image, comme au cinématographe’ (p. 70) – and will herself become the object of aesthetic attention, ‘cire fondante dans [les] mains [de son mari]’ (p. 384), Nadja shuns ‘visibility’. Whilst Nfissa’s

²⁸⁴ One might also question the expression ‘maquis intérieur’, which Bonn (unusually) uses to denote the urban militia, and not, properly speaking, the *maquis*.

²⁸⁵ *Le Roman Algérien*, p. 107.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ ‘Writing Woman’, p. 79.

²⁸⁸ Thus Nfissa – on hearing of the bomb planted by a militant named ‘Nadja ou Nadia’ – knows instinctively that the woman in question is her younger sibling (p. 372). And when Nadja is interrogated, Nfissa too sinks into pain and delirium, envisaging the militant ‘écartelée sur un lit de tortures’ and experiencing her own, consequent, miscarriage as ‘[un] arrachement comme d’une prison souterraine de métal’ (p. 440).

rebellion is always overt – ‘Je peux paraître n’importe quoi!’ (p. 319) – Nadja’s is always covert. Her gestures of defiance take place in blacked-out cells.

LA STRATÉGIE-FEMME (II)

Charles Bonn accords the novel’s forays into italic script the status of ‘langage de femmes’, defining them, subsequently, as ‘conversations’ and then ‘paroles de femmes [...] centrées autour de Nadja’.²⁸⁹ An equally apt epithet might be the Irigarayan ‘speaking (as) woman’ or *parler-femme*, and an equally apt description of the youngest character’s ‘communication’ the ‘disclaimer’ formulated in *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*: ‘mon langage [...] se parle, il ne se méta-parle pas’.²⁹⁰ It is difficult to summarize the contents of Djébar’s typographical asides, to account for the rumours, the flashbacks and allusions to incarceration that punctuate the later chapters of *Les Alouettes naïves*. Each episode must be read ‘between the lines’ of the plain text that surrounds and overshadows it, yet each one functions as a rupture rather than a suture in the chain of narrative logic. The sole feature that these interurrences do share is an inclination towards (gender) separatism; an emphasis on exclusivity Irigaray articulates with the words, ‘dans [les] lieux des femmes-entre-elles, quelque chose s’énonce d’un parler-femme’, and which Djébar came to reiterate, fervently, in *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement*.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ *Le Roman Algérien*, p. 107. *Les Alouettes naïves* does not, as Bonn implies, confine its use of italics strictly to ‘la troisième partie du roman’, but introduces them around sixty pages earlier, whilst Nadja is still a fairly peripheral character. To give some idea of the tone, the first italicized sequence includes Houria and Zineb’s account of their visit to the cinema, the story of a repudiation that took place in the village, a funeral scene, and a tortuous joke about Moses and the archangel Gabriel. It culminates in the great-grandmother’s life- and family- history: a history reprinted, under the title ‘Nostalgie de la horde’, in *Femmes d’Alger* (pp. 135-142) and referred to, there, as ‘un texte qui [...] entre [...] comme murmure féminin collectif, dans [...] la mémoire d’une chaîne d’aïeules [qui] retrouve les années 1830’ (p. 167). The second sequence describes a great-aunt’s attitude towards sexual intercourse. As *Les Alouettes* progresses, however, Nadja does indeed become increasingly central to the episodes in italic script. And it is on these grounds that I have chosen to focus on *her* presentation as ‘other’, rather than attempting to elaborate on the role played by italics in the characterization of every one of Djébar’s (numerous) female protagonists.

²⁹⁰ *Ce sexe*, p. 141. For the purposes of clarity, I have also drawn on Catherine Porter’s English translation, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

²⁹¹ *Ce sexe*, p. 133.

Je ne vois pour les femmes arabes qu'un seul moyen de tout débloquent: parler, parler sans cesse d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, parler entre nous, dans tous les gynécées, les traditionnels et ceux des H.L.M. Parler entre nous et regarder. [...] La femme-regard et la femme-voix. [...] La voix qui cherche dans les tombeaux ouverts!²⁹²

Les Alouettes naïves reserves its shifts in format, in the main, for women's thoughts and women's reactions, italicizing Nadja's exchanges with her sisters, with her mother, with her cell-mate, italicizing the 'old wives' tales' that occupy an older generation. In the 'standard' chapters, men tell us about female protagonists. In the 'subsections', there are no male narrators. *Parler-femme*, here, is also – as Bonn's terms indicate – *par les femmes*.

In her study of Irigaray's 'philosophy', Margaret Whitford suggests that the Frenchwoman's elusive 'feminine syntax' be treated, in the first instance, from a psychoanalytic standpoint. 'What one is looking for,' she remarks, 'is evidence of a particular psychic configuration'.²⁹³ For Whitford, the discursive anomalies associated with 'speaking (as) woman' are comparable to the incursions that the unconscious makes into rational speech; or more accurately, to the 'pathologies' (hysteria, obsession) inherent in those incursions. And just as the diagnosis of pathology tends to suppose certain temporary conditions – an analyst, a 'couch' – the diagnosis of *parler-femme*, too, may be determined by ephemera, by locus and audience. Its symptoms register only fleetingly *as symptoms*. 'I think', she notes, 'that *parler-femme* must refer to enunciation, [...] [it] has no meta-language, since in the moment of enunciation the enunciation is directed towards an interlocutor (even if this direction is in the mode of avoidance), and cannot speak about itself'.²⁹⁴ The 'signs' of femininity, in this hypothesis, are often formulated in 'non-integrated' settings, and 'speaking (as) woman' can coincide with 'speaking-among-women', but it does not forcibly do so: witness Whitford's caveat. *Parler-femme*, at times, might constitute an apostrophic circumvention, a refusal to 'speak-among', to address.

Djebar's treatise on Algerian women makes a similar point. Her ventures into alternative syntax – 'expressed' in parts of *Les Alouettes naïves* as 'small talk', as *tête-à-tête* – reach a kind of apogee in denial. When we last encounter Nadja, she has been shot in the leg attempting to escape from the French, and is lying, delirious, on a prison bunk. The stench of gangrene fails to dissuade her captors from staging an interrogation. '– Tu

²⁹² 'Femmes d'Alger', pp. 60-61.

²⁹³ Luce Irigaray: *Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 40.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 41.

es la Nadjia de la bombe! Inutile de le cacher, voici une photo! (p. 451). For all the intensity of their questioning, however, the assault on sentience is not such that it precludes any apprehension beyond the torment of the body. In contrast to *Nedjma*, where the male protagonist experiences torture as the erosion of his/story, there is no suggestion, here, that physical pain might hold a ‘monopoly’ on either the past or present tense. Nor is the imagery of the anguished subject one of splintering anatomies, the ‘reins, [...] genoux, [...] cheville’ of Kateb’s novel, the head, mouth, and torso of *La Bataille d’Alger*. Nadjia sees things differently. ‘Son regard se refixa sur les ombres [...] – Ce sont des feuilles d’arbre! ... des feuilles d’arbre!’ (p. 450). Despite the colonel’s insistence that the photograph contains her story, she ignores his picture of the *militante*.

Elle se laissait absorber par la nuit définitive, [...] l’image des arbres [...] la renversant bien au-delà.

– Ma petite fille ...

– Qui me guérira, ô mère?

– Ma petite fille, rappelle-toi toutes nos herbes [...] Prends des feuilles d’absinthe et des feuilles de noisetier, ajoutes-y de la menthe sauvage séchée, un brin de thym et du laurier, [...] bois des gorgées de ce mélange, puis avale un œuf cuit dans ces herbes ... (pp. 451-452)

Les Alouettes naïves, in a sense, portends the project that Irigaray would set herself some five years later: to revise the ‘dominant discourse’, ‘[de retraverser] l’imaginaire “masculin”, c’est-à-dire, [...] notre imaginaire culturel, [...] pour en remarquer le “dehors” possible’.²⁹⁵ Djebbar’s novel, like an interview, gains impetus from analysing extant visions; and like an interview, her novel comes progressively to efface those visions, to dispense with the ‘aid to memory’, in its explicit form at least. Yet the Algerian’s pursuit of ‘unmediated’ testimony – of extemporary speeches and impromptu retrospection – still leads her to the impasse that Irigaray must confront in postulating *parler-femme*. If, inquires the latter, ‘l’inconscient est, actuellement et pour une part, du féminin-refoulé-censuré de l’histoire, [...] cet inconscient n’est-il pas encore, finalement, une *propriété du discours*?’ And if the unconscious bears comparison with a long checked ‘femininity’ that Irigaray attempts to address and aspires to *express* – if the unconscious, in her words, ‘a emprunté au féminin’ – might not ‘speaking (as) woman’, too, be ‘proper’ to the structures which ostensibly occlude it?²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ *Ce sexe*, p. 157. Irigaray is referring, here, not to the work ‘in hand’, but to *Speculum. De l’autre femme*, published in 1974.

²⁹⁶ *Ce sexe*, p. 123, p. 122.

The questions are, to some extent, rhetorical. There is, Irigaray concedes, no (simple) practicable way to leap ‘hors du [...] phallogocratisme’, to ‘exit’ the current cultural system.²⁹⁷ Nadja’s disregard for ‘appearances’ – for visual images – is intelligible solely within the context afforded by those images; she can, so to speak, ‘not look’ at the photograph precisely because it is there to be ‘not looked at’. Irigaray’s analysis of philosophy will, similarly, prove a critique of the very discourse that furnishes her terms. To posit a mode of representation that might be absolutely ‘other’ to ‘men’s languages’ is, as Whitford remarks, to ‘imagine the unimaginable’. ‘Speaking (as) woman is not only a psycholinguistic description, it is also a name for something that does not yet exist’.²⁹⁸ Both Djébar and Irigaray, therefore, adopt interim tactics, embracing a style in lieu of a ‘syntax’, turning their phrases to accentuate the patriarchal ‘feminine’, the irrational, the non-linear, the ‘natural’.²⁹⁹ Or, as Irigaray has it, ‘playing with mimesis’, resubmitting themselves ‘à des “idées” [...] [de la femme] élaborées dans-par une logique masculine, mais pour faire “apparaître”, par un effet de [...] répétition, ce qui devait rester occulté’.³⁰⁰ For Djébar, specifically, female experience may be troped as clandestine,

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 157.

²⁹⁸ Luce Irigaray, p. 22, p. 42.

²⁹⁹ And both, as a result, have been subjected to charges of ‘regressive’ essentialism, of a-historicizing ‘woman’ in such a way as to leave her – ultimately – ‘outside the realm in which one may work for change’ (Whitford, p. 16). Thus Lynne Segal complains that ‘the writings of Irigaray are most readily interpreted as strengthening and celebrating traditional gender ideologies of [...] difference between women and men’, whilst Monique Gadant accuses Djébar ‘d’affirmer la capacité des femmes de soutenir plus fort que certains hommes [...] les valeurs patriarcales qui fondent la tradition’. For Gadant, indeed, the latter’s address to ‘*culture féminine*’ seems tantamount, at times, to a panegyric on the disenfranchised state. ‘Cette culture entraîne, chez elle, une idéalisation des lieux féminins, du harem, qui sont moins présentés comme des lieux d’exclusion, effet d’une contradiction entre les sexes et d’une incompatibilité instituée entre l’espace public (masculin) et l’espace privé (féminin) que comme les lieux privilégiés de l’entre-soi féminin. [...] La séparation des sexes, imposée, y devient une valeur.’ (Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 133; Gadant, *Le Nationalisme*, pp. 279-280.) On one level, however, Djébar’s use of the first-person singular is itself a ‘working for change’ – if not a *political* claim for representation – since Maghrebian custom debars women from the pronoun ‘I’. Even for men, she notes, ‘identifying’ members of the female sex requires circumlocution: ‘tout autochtone, pauvre ou riche, n’évoqu[e] femme et enfants que par le biais de cette vague périphrase: “la maison”’. For women themselves, the taboo against ‘singularity’ is absolute: ‘Jamais le “je” de la première personne ne sera utilisé’. (*L’Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1985; repr. Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 48, p. 177.)

³⁰⁰ *Ce sexe*, p. 74.

subfuscous, ‘subterranean, [...] [her] favourite word’; *Les Alouettes*, she has said, ‘[pitches into] depth time’.³⁰¹

Elizabeth Berg summarizes the rationale behind such ‘figurative’ tactics in lucid fashion:

If a woman is given an image – if she is represented – this representation must necessarily take place within the context of a phallogentric system. [...] On the other hand, the presence of the woman as blank space – as refusal of representation – only serves to provide a backdrop or support for masculine projections [...] Whether [the writer] presents an image of woman or not she continues the effacement of woman as Other. Irigaray attempts to steer a third course between these two alternatives by fixing her gaze on the support itself: focusing resolutely on the blank spaces of masculine representation, and revealing their disruptive power. At the same time, however, she is obliged to advance some image of woman if only to hold open this blank space. The images she proposes – of fluids, caves, etc. – are empty ones; woman is described in terms of analogies which themselves resist definition.³⁰²

In *Les Alouettes naïves*, I would suggest, the (equally) ‘empty’ and amorphous images of female subjectivity coincide with those forms that superstition hollows out to mark the loss of life from body; those ontological ‘unthinkables’ which mark the exile of the voice from speech, from self-expression. ‘Philosophy’, writes Whitford, ‘[...] cannot encompass sexual difference’.³⁰³ ‘Il n’y a jamais eu de *scholar*’, writes Derrida, ‘qui ait vraiment, en tant que tel, affaire au fantôme’.³⁰⁴ Djébar’s writing ‘echoes’ both. The figure of the *mort dressé* – or *living dead* – ghosts women’s alienation from the scene of philosophical as well as political representation.³⁰⁵ And women, in turn, come to stand for the ranks of Algeria’s ‘unburied’, for the visible-invisible victims of war and torture. After her interrogation, every ‘consciousness’ of Nadjia starts to vanish from the novel.

³⁰¹ Quoted in Clarisse Zimra, ‘Afterword’ to *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), pp. 159-211 (p. 185, p. 177).

³⁰² ‘The Third Woman’, *Diacritics* 12.2 (1982), 11-20 (p. 17). Assia Djébar’s most pronounced use of this kind of imagery, it should be pointed out, occurs neither in *Les Alouettes naïves*, nor in *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* (which I discuss later in the chapter), but in her – better-known – texts of the 1980’s. Irigaray’s preoccupation with the elemental, for example, finds a parallel in ‘Femmes d’Alger’, which privileges the terms ‘*porteuse d’eau*’ (p. 46) and ‘*portuses de feu*’ (p. 54) and ‘designates’ its author as a ‘*sourcière*’ or water diviner (p. 7).

³⁰³ *Luce Irigaray*, p. 100.

³⁰⁴ *Spectres*, p. 33.

³⁰⁵ Although it is now predominantly associated with American films such as *Night of the Living Dead*, the expression ‘living dead’ first gained currency as a translation of a Swahili term denoting ‘those whose names are still recalled in oral tradition, [...] [as opposed to] the absolutely forgotten’ (Thompson p. 26).

Her own self-affirmations cease with a final incantation of the mother's remedy '– *Des feuilles d'absinthe et de noisetier, reprend la jeune fille à la jambe alourdie et qui pue sous la tente*' (p. 452). For her father, '[elle] s'était évanouie bien avant son arrestation' (p.467). The heroine's destiny, here, is no destiny; it is limbo, oblivion without release.

If phantoms, customarily, 'double' for subjects denied their 'proper place in the text of tradition', the same could be said of Djébar's fictive *militante*.³⁰⁶ Nadja, to put it simply, 'exemplifies' the problem that the male narrator sets but does not solve: 'en dehors des prostituées, en dehors du harem respectable des épouses cloîtrées, où mettre les héroïnes?' (p. 270). *Les Alouettes naïves* caused outrage at the time of publication, shocking Muslim readers with its attention to (Nfissa's) sexuality, with 'the display of a female pleasure [that was] no longer [solely] at the service of men'.³⁰⁷ In some analyses, the text remains a statement of erotic discovery, the 'first draft' of an *œuvre* which does, recurrently, make 'flesh [...] a metaphor for [...] [the] nonsubjugated female self'; the 'female self that language, the preserve of men, cannot access'.³⁰⁸ In its focus on *evanescent* 'others', however, Djébar's 1967 novel sets a precedent for her exploration of a different kind of 'blank space': a space that is not feminin(iz)e(d), yet has, for all that, been 'whited out' by discourse just as Pontecorvo bleached away the features of Hassiba Ben Bouali. More specifically, I think, *Les Alouettes* sets a precedent for the strange 'ghost story' that would constitute its author's response to another historical conflict, and another wave of horror: *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*.

'IS THIS YOUR – BURIED TREASURE?'

In December 1991, national elections took place for the first time in post-war Algeria. The F.L.N.'s decision to enter multiparty politics had not been a voluntary one; it was the 'final' gambit in the government's moves to quell the violence that had been escalating since opposition riots swept Algiers three years earlier. When the

³⁰⁶ Žižek, p. 23.

³⁰⁷ Zimra, 'Afterword', p. 194.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 206. *Les Alouettes naïves* was, in fact, Djébar's fourth novel – but as she herself points out, critics have tended to 'cross out the first three [*La Soif*, *Les Impatients*, *Les Enfants du nouveau monde*] and claim that [her] true career started with *Alouettes*'. (Quoted in Zimra, 'Afterword', p. 178.)

fundamentalist *Front Islamique du Salut* emerged as the certain victor, the elections were annulled and civil war began in earnest. In the decade that followed, the country was to be torn, once again, between terrorists and security forces. ‘There leaked out accounts of torture, executions without trial, and “disappearances” [...] [which] recalled the worst moments of the French Occupation’.³⁰⁹ Like the nationalist activists of the 1950’s, the F.I.S. and its sympathizers sought to restore public ‘morality’, including a respect for female seclusion or non-*mixité* – where that precept was not already in force. Any woman caught alone in the streets would risk a beating, and vigilante groups began patrolling outside student halls of residence, ‘refoul[ant] le visiteur masculin qui n’[était] pas un parent, tent[ant] d’interdire aux jeunes filles de sortir après 18 heures, heure limite au-delà de laquelle aucune “femme honnête” ne saurait mettre le nez dehors’.³¹⁰ Unlike the nationalists, the fundamentalists found targets for their wrath in intellectuals, as well as ‘sinners’.

The principles behind the campaign against Algeria’s intelligentsia were set down in a letter to the editor of a daily newspaper in 1993. ‘Ceux et celles,’ wrote the (anonymous) author, ‘qui se réclament de la démocratie depuis plus de vingt ans [...] [et] ne veulent pas reconnaître le choix populaire [...] [doivent être] exécutés pour sauver l’Algérie’. His threat would be accompanied by a chilling appraisal of the journalist Tahar Djaout, dead that summer: ‘extrémiste de la francophonie, ennemi acharné de la langue du Coran, de la religion islamique et des constantes nationales’.³¹¹ This ‘extremist’ was not the only writer so condemned. The playwright Abdelkader Alloula had been gunned down in March, and two others – Mahfoud Boucebi and M’Hamed Boukhobza – would fall victim, as Djaout did, in June. *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, in one sense, is a record of their deaths; a ‘freeze-frame’ study in mortality that re-animates its subjects solely to still them, to ‘pen’ them into the moment of agony. ‘J’ai voulu [...] décrire, pour chacun, le jour de l’assassinat et des funérailles’, says Djébar, and she does. But the fatalities of 1993 come to front a longer procession, taking in Kateb, too, and Fanon, ‘[la] procession [...] des écrivains d’Algérie, depuis au moins une génération, saisis à l’approche de leur mort’.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Horne, p. 566.

³¹⁰ Georges Marion, ‘Les femmes comme enjeu’, *Le Monde*, 19 April 1990; reprinted in *L’Algérie*, ed. Patrick Eveno (Paris: Le Monde-Éditions, 1994), pp. 123-124 (p. 124).

³¹¹ Quoted in Catherine Simon, ‘Tu vas mourir ...’, *Le Monde*, 11 August 1993; reprinted in *L’Algérie* pp. 132-133 (p. 132).

³¹² *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, p. 11. Further references to this text are given after quotations.

Each writer, in this sombre sequence, will tell us something of their entourage, as well as something of their own (abrogated) time. 'C'est autour [du] corps [de l'écrivain]', notes Djébar's preface, 'que s'entrecroisent et s'esquissent plusieurs Algéries ...' (p. 12). The 'moral' of her tale, indeed, would seem to be akin to that of Woolf's 'Haunted House', whose phantom protagonists are always questing, always striving to unearth some unknown riches. When they finally come to 'search the sleepers' – the couple who now own the house – the wife realizes that the ghosts' 'secret' is hers as well as theirs, and waking, cries, 'is this *your* – buried treasure? The light in the heart.'³¹³ *Le Blanc*, likewise, finds lessons on the living in its requiems for the dead. Kateb Yacine's 1989 obsequies dissolve in premonitory chaos, as ululating women vie with imam and officials to compose his epitaph, and the *Internationale* rings out, for the first time, across Muslim graves. Fanon dies alone in New York, parted from the wife whom F.L.N. officials had not thought fit to summon. And Djaout smiles at two bearded adolescents before they execute him, in the name of Allah, and then steal his car.

In the corridors and bedrooms of the 'Haunted House', the *revenant* speaks in the same clipped tones that will voice the apprehension of the living. 'Upstairs –' 'In the garden –' 'Here we left our treasure –'.³¹⁴ Djébar allows her protagonists an 'imprint' of alterity, at least, shifting her typography to indicate their entrance. '*Il le sait, il le sent, [...] les années violentes reviennent. [...] Mais il est las, [...] il tourne le dos à la terre Algérie, à la mère incarcérée, à Nedjma disparue*' (p. 176). Yet she also pushes to its limits the paradox of Woolf's conclusion, of an exposition that inscribes occlusion; for a ghost endowed with 'light', it would seem, is a ghost on the brink of dispersal – or no ghost at all. The *blanc* of the work's title is the mark of Algeria's bereavement, a chasm gouged in culture, in literature; the sudden inability of the eloquent to speak themselves. And it is a mark of bedazzlement, a glare that forces humans' gaze from every 'apparition', that leaves dead men to the confines of their unseen 'prison-house'. '*Le blanc du linceul*' (p. 61), '[*le blanc de la*] *poussière dans laquelle les dizaines de témoins [...] qui vous ont accompagnés à la tombe [...] s'empêtrèrent*'. '*Poussière [...] qui cautérise, qui affaiblit, et adoucit*' (p. 59).

White/spaces, in other words, serve Djébar as her figures for erasure, not simply the erased. The luminants that cross and re-cross *Le Blanc's* pages – the dust that bleaches the mourners' clothes, the photographic flash that blinds Kateb's son to the cortege of his

³¹³ 'A Haunted House', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp. 116-117 (p. 117).

³¹⁴ Ibid.

father – are this text's attestation to its own, ambivalent, status. By breaking up the continuity of vision, Djébar (effectively) de-naturalizes the image of a past 'resurgent', the image of Algerians who live and die 'again'. She may write, at times, as though possessed – 'je ne sais plus qui parle, [...] je ne sais pas [...] qui est le fantôme' (p. 19) – but 'speaking (as) ghost', implicitly, is as uneasy an endeavour as *parler-femme*. There can be no articulation of the other (side) that is not, *in some sense*, ventriloquism; and no appeal to absence that is not, in some sense, its re(in)statement. Woolf's phantoms speak their quest in too-familiar voices, 'divulge' secrets without specificity to witnesses who were, already, 'in the know'. Djébar asks, how could they do otherwise? '*Je ne demande rien: seulement qu'ils nous hantent encore, qu'ils nous habitent. Mais dans quelle langue?*' (p. 60).

Perhaps, however, the 'point' of Woolf's ending is not her answer, but her address, the emphatic apostrophe, '*your* – buried treasure'. And perhaps the 'point' of *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* is not the possibility, but the necessity, of talking (to) ghosts. 'Spectrality', as Fredric Jameson observes, 'does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist'; it requires only the conviction that the 'living present is scarcely [...] self-sufficient', that there are, in Hamlet's phrase, 'more things in heaven and earth, [...] / Than are dreamt of in [our] philosophy' (I.5.174-175), or our time.³¹⁵ To attend to the *revenant* is to allow for the unknowable, and the unintelligible, to extend some recognition to those who are already dead, as well as those who have yet to be born. 'Il faut parler *du* fantôme', claims Derrida, 'voire *au* fantôme et *avec* lui, dès lors qu'aucune éthique, aucune politique, ne paraît possible et pensable et *juste*, qui ne reconnaisse à son principe le respect pour ces autres [...] qui ne sont pas [...] là, *présentement vivants*'.³¹⁶ Djébar's book, in many ways, is an essay on the consequence of forgetting, of banishing the invisible, the not-now-there. Her Algeria, it transpires, is a land where no ethics, no politics of any kind seem 'possible' or 'thinkable' or 'just'; a state where torture recurs without outcry, and Massu's 'pratiques spéciales' have become 'pratiques ordinaires' (p. 217).

Le Blanc de l'Algérie, in this respect, is testimony above all to despair. 'Le sang, pour moi, reste blanc cendre', concluded Djébar, elsewhere, the same year.³¹⁷ That cry of impotence and aphasia might be her leitmotiv here too. By the end of the text, its suffering authors, like the *militante*, '[se seront] laiss[és] absorber par la nuit définitive',

³¹⁵ 'Marx's Purloined Letter', in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker, (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 26-67 (p. 39).

³¹⁶ *Spectres*, p. 15.

³¹⁷ *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 347.

‘[par] une nuit algérienne qui n’est plus coloniale’ (p. 264). Yet the attempt to ‘sound’ Algeria’s darkness – to salvage something from the country’s wreckage – is not entirely in vain. ‘*Parler-femme*,’ writes Luce Irigaray, ‘permettrait [...] aux femmes de parler aux hommes’; and Djebbar, in her turn, will find an unexpected interlocutor.³¹⁸ When her voice falters, Kateb’s poetry comes back to fill the void.

Lente ou violente chacun sa mort
[...] c’est toujours la même
Pour ceux qui ont appris
A lire dans les ténèbres
Et qui les yeux fermés
N’ont pas cessé d’écrire
Mourir ainsi c’est vivre (p. 91).³¹⁹

³¹⁸ *Ce sexe*, p. 134.

³¹⁹ Extract from ‘C’est vivre’, full version in Kateb, *L’Œuvre en fragments* (Paris: Sindbad, 1986), p. 97. This poem is itself, like *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, a homage to departed writers – ‘[les] voix brisées’ – and, specifically, to ‘Fanon, Amrouche, et Feraoun’.

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ON LUISA VALENZUELA AND ‘PETRONILLA DE HEATH’

Algo de esto ha sido vivido antes, aunque quizá no directamente por ella. Algo está allí al borde de su memoria tratando de expresarse y ella quiere y no quiere recuperarlo. Quiere, y se esfuerza, y sabe que es muy necesario, vital casi, y quedándose muy quieta con los ojos cerrados presente que va a poder recomponerse, encontrar las piezas de algún rompecabezas interno y por ahí el recuerdo le sirva para entender algo de toda esta incongruencia (I).

Luisa Valenzuela, *Realidad nacional desde la cama*

There are, at least in folklore, many kinds of shade: the ‘personal dead’ or *revenant* who comes to haunt his foes, his kin; the ‘impersonal dead’, chasing, in a crowd, across the night horizon; the ‘animal shadow’, the familiar. There is – or not, according to belief – more than one hell, more than one limbo, one other-world. And there is, as Derrida observes, ‘plus ou moins qu’un continent noir, plus ou moins d’un noir, noir comme [...] l’inexploré, le féminin, [...] noir comme le mal, noir comme l’horreur indicible de la violence, de la torture ou de l’extermination’.³²⁰ In this chapter, I shall examine the texts of a woman writer whose conception of the feminine is more obviously ‘earth-bound’ than Irigaray’s, whose projection of injustice is more obviously ‘double’ to the living than Djébar’s etiolated ‘living dead’: the Argentinean, Luisa Valenzuela. The ‘red thread’ (trans)fusing past and present, in her work, is not only the dotted line that, for Derrida, joins Shakespeare’s wraiths to Marx’s, Marx’s, in turn, to Valéry’s – the trail of *extinguished* footsteps, of phantom returns. It is also the ‘placenta’ which can, for an inquisitor, join humans to astral abettors; the cord which lets witches lie low, whilst demon helpers do their will. The un-quantifiable that she invokes is not only *Hamlet*’s ‘thing appear’d’

³²⁰ *Psyché: Invention de l’autre* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987; expanded edn. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1998), p. 329.

(I.1.24). It is also, I suggest, a nebula, a doubt, a question which hangs over *Macbeth*. ‘What is’t you do?’ asks the thane, there, and hags reply, ‘A deed without a name’.³²¹

Valenzuela, indeed, takes neither Clytemnestra nor Iphigenia as her iconic *mère immolée*, but the figure of a fourteenth-century ‘occultist’, Petronilla.³²² The latter, an Irishwoman condemned to burn for sorcery, serves as a paradigm of difference suppressed; a medieval counterpart to the classical exemplar of femininity caught in a double-bind, do and be damned, don’t and be damned. She was, writes Valenzuela, guilty of ‘palabras malas, aquellas que podrían perturbar el [...] orden del discurso masculino’ (II) and guilty, too, ‘de haber emitido las palabras que le habían sido impuestas’, *palabras buenas*. ‘Pobre Petronilla [...]. Pobre todas nosotras’ (III).³²³ What is significant, for the feminist-novelist, is that Petronilla rebelled against her executioners, poured scorn and ire across the flames. What is equally significant, for my ends here, is that the accusations levelled at this luckless spinster would include charges of consorting with the immaterial, of summoning spectres, raising ‘hell’. ‘The [Petronilla] case is one of the earliest involving the idea of a familiar spirit, and the [...] [first] known example in European history of a woman [indicted for] acquiring occult power through sexual intercourse’: in other words, through incubation.³²⁴ Such themes are likewise central to the Torquemadan history inscribed in Valenzuela’s fiction, to the chronicle of an age that (once again) ‘saw’ *corps prothétiques* commit *actions prothétiques*, intangible ‘beings’ perform intangible ‘crimes’.

Argentina, as a nation, has much in common with Algeria in terms of haunting, in terms of absent-present dead. ‘Este pueblo’, to quote another Latin American author, Juan Rulfo, ‘ésta lleno de ecos. Tal parece que estuvieran encerrados en en el hueco de las paredes o debajo de las piedras’ (IV).³²⁵ The conquest of the lands around the Río de la Plata was not, by the standards of the time, genocidal, but might rival any act of

³²¹ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1951), IV.1.48-49.

³²² The ‘surname’ that Valenzuela gives us, ‘de Heath’, appears to be a mis-transcription, since all other accounts call the condemned woman, ‘of Meath’. However, I have chosen to preserve the error, in this chapter’s heading, the better to signal my *primary* interest: Petronilla as the Argentinean presents her, rather than Petronilla, the real-life ‘witch’.

³²³ ‘Mis brujas favoritas’, in *Theory and Practice of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gabriela Mora and Karen S. Van Hooft (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press, 1982), pp. 88-95 (p. 90, p. 91).

³²⁴ Andrew Sanders, *A Deed without a Name: The Witch in Society and History* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), p. 163.

³²⁵ *Pedro Páramo/El llano en llamas* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955/1953; repr. Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1993), p. 36.

French expansionism in ferocity; by the nineteenth century, settlers, as well as indigenes, had come to appear – *in esse* – ‘expendable’. ‘Primero la patria, luego el partido y después los hombres’ (V) went one popular saying, and the sentiments behind it would hold good ten decades on, as regime after regime continued sacrificing flesh to ‘patriotism’, to politics. 1919 became infamous for the massacre of striking workers in the capital (the so-called *semana trágica*), ’21 and ’22 for anti-Patagonian atrocities, the 1940s for government assaults on students and other ‘agitators’. Yet the junta which took power in 1976 initiated violence of a scale and scope that exceeded previous abuse. It was no longer enough to perpetuate a war which had ‘come back’, to exorcize the spectres of perennial threat: the self-declared leftist, the Peronist, the union. New phantoms must be detected, ‘sprung’ from bodies that were not possessed by spirits of maleficence but, rather, possessed them – witch-doubles, parallel personae which might or might not really act.

The novel I discuss in most depth, the bowdlerized and (largely) neglected *Como en la guerra*, is a take on this strange ‘alternative’ dimension, this realm where innocence can co-exist with guilt, corporeal inertia ‘mask’ supernal frenzy.³²⁶ Even Valenzuela’s title, derived from junta discourse, bespeaks a certain conflation of supposition and hard fact; ‘as if at war’ ran the slogan, and the ‘as if’ would soon be lost, mislaid by ministers on ‘campaign’ trails. Her story also seems to set aside the conditional clause, blurring every distinction between empiricism and fancy, between bodily gesture and cerebral fugue. To make sense of the fictive jumble that emerges, it is, perhaps, necessary to explore the ‘methods’ of making non-sense, the traumatic modes of repression and dissociation – which in themselves recall the forms of revenants and of familiars, the unquiet grave and elusive coven. ‘In narratological terms,’ notes Mieke Bal,

Repression results in ellipsis – the omission of important events in a narrative – whereas dissociation doubles a strand of the narrative theories of events by splitting off a sideline. [...] Repression interrupts

³²⁶ Although Valenzuela’s later work has received considerable critical attention *Como en la guerra* (like *Les Alouettes naïves*) tends to be cited briefly, not examined. Only three article-length studies have so far been devoted to the novel: a chapter in Sharon Magnarelli’s book, *Reflections/Refractions: Reading Luisa Valenzuela*, (Romance Languages and Literature, 80 (New York: Peter Lang, 1988)), and two Lacanian readings, Juanamaria Cordones-Cook’s ‘*Como en la guerra*: en busca del otro’, (*Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos*, 16.2 (1992), 171-185) and Edward Haworth Hoepfner’s ‘The Hand that mirrors us: Luisa Valenzuela’s Re-writing of Lacan’s Theory of Identity’ (*Latin American Literary Review*, 20 (1992), 9-17).

the flow of narrative that shapes memory; dissociation splits off material that cannot then be reincorporated into the main narrative.³²⁷

In psychological terms, ‘repression’ implies that an injurious experience has, retrospectively, been interred in the unconscious, that the memory of that experience will ‘rise’, unbidden, from our mental recesses much as more mundane ‘taboos’ do. The traumatic nightmare is subject to ‘mechanisms of distortion, symbolic substitution and displacement’ similar to those at work in ordinary dreams; the subject plays out some ghostly semblance of past horrors, but not their exact ‘like’.³²⁸ ‘Dissociation’, conversely, connotes a splintering of the psyche at the moment of crisis, a cognitive bisection leaving one half of the personality oblivious to the events in hand, whilst the other registers them in precise detail. Because it is the latter half that takes over in dreams and flashbacks, the re-enactment constitutes an undistorted or (for many theorists) ‘literal’ replication of earlier occurrences: a dire, mimetic, twin.³²⁹

In the section ‘Journeys in the Unknown’ I explore the ways in which *Como en la guerra*’s narrator, AZ, quells his awareness of cruelty, his cognizance of pain. I draw on Caruth’s reading of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to trace the dynamics of repression across the terrain of dictatorship, through Valenzuela’s novel. Although AZ himself is tortured that pain is not his alone. As a psychoanalyst he encounters a patient who has suffered in the course of ‘freedom-fighting’; and, ironically, the processes that enable the occlusion of *her* trauma are the very ones which should in Freudian practice reverse such ‘falsifying’ trends. Valenzuela’s male protagonist insists upon un-picking images of history to reveal fantastic ‘truths’, screens out evidence of actual assault in search of other, oneiric, causes. In this sense, he is, arguably, closer to Freud than might at first glance be assumed. The Austrian found it hard to grasp the signs of shellshock, interpreting the ills of soldiers stunned by battle according to neurotic schemes. And the model later thinkers have evolved the better to account for re-lived torment is the model I adopt in section three, which teases out symptoms of dissociation from *Como en la guerra*’s ‘primal’ scenes.

³²⁷ Introduction to *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (London: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. vii-xvii (p. ix).

³²⁸ Leys, p. 241.

³²⁹ In a sense, then, Djébar’s ‘double’, Nadja, falls somewhere between two stools, psychologically: her ordeals are not, in Bal’s words, ‘incorporated into the main narrative’, but the insights we are given into her consciousness scarcely present a historically ‘accurate’ depiction of suffering.

Pinpointing indications of a fissure through the self, however, presents something of a challenge where the original, Argentine, edition is concerned. The censors expunged all explicit references to torture, which function in the uncut version, to use Bal's terminology, as 'side'-plotted, 'doubled strands'; they left us only the recital of an opaque and clouded dreamscape, a flight away from fact. The best that can be done, it appears, is to stress the trope, the time of fracture, which Cathy Caruth calls 'departure': for the novel has never yet returned to press. Another Spanish-language testimony to trauma bearing Valenzuela's name would be issued in full form in 1982, so I make that text, instead, my coda to the exposition of the myth, 'as if at war'. 'Cambio de armas' too deals in repression, staging a drama, one might say, of 'motivated' forgetting – amnesia brought on to save the ego, to preserve the conscious mind. But the 'self' that acts, there, to avenge the torture victim is a dissociated self, a 'double' to the torpid heroine which retains the imprint of pain, retains the imprint of the person that she was, when disaster first struck. The catalyst for exertion, moreover, is physical, somatic. Where Petronilla's persecutors exploited notions of 'familiarity', of incubi, to turn attention *from* the body, in its innocence, and later, in its agony, Valenzuela deploys the image *of* the body to sweep aside projections of demonic 'culpability'. Where the 'twin' that mutinies, in dictatorial discourse, is the evil-intentioned spirit, the 'double' that dissents, in her work, is the scarred, down-trodden, flesh.

A PHANTOM PROOF SOCIETY

'When diabolism rises, [...] actions are the least important manifests of the true nature of man'. So reads Arthur Miller's treatise on the paranoia of his own time, as well as the paranoia of another; on the Puritan suspicion of Satanism that found an outlet in the Salem witch-hunt and an echo in the 1950s fear of 'the Red hell'.³³⁰ His play *The Crucible* depicts an authority intent on the extirpation of 'invisible crimes', iniquities which none but the 'perpetrators' and 'victims' can witness or declare. Nominally, these crimes are crimes of witchcraft, their arraigners, drawn from the seventeenth-century judiciary. The rituals of accusation and confession, however, are also those of a latter-day Un-American Activities Committee. The Puritans' hysteria over demonology runs in clear and chilling

³³⁰ *The Crucible* (London: Cresset, 1956; repr. London: Penguin, 2000), p. 39, p. 38.

parallel to the right-wing fever that McCarthy and his colleagues strove to nurture. ‘Both prosecutions,’ as Miller later put it, alleged ‘membership of a secret, disloyal group’. And where the accused came to concede, even renounce, their treachery, both prosecutions demanded the same proof of ‘good faith’: a list of confederates in ‘malfeasance’. Informers, in short, ‘became the [...] axle of the plot’s existence, [...] the investigation’s necessity.’³³¹

There were, Miller continues, impediments to the trial of men by hearsay. ‘Most suspected people named by others as members of the Devil’s conspiracy had not been shown to have actually *done* anything, neither [...] setting barns on fire, [...] nor [...] undermining the virtue of wives.’ In Salem, judges devised an ingenious way around this absence of corroborating indicia:

To the rescue came [...] a piece of poetry [...] called ‘Spectral Evidence’. [...] All the prosecution need do was produce a witness who claimed to have seen, not an accused person, but his familiar spirit – his living ghost [...] – in the act of [...] throwing a burning brand into a barn full of hay. You could be at home asleep in your bed, but your spirit could be crawling through your neighbour’s window to feel up his wife. The owner of [the] wandering spirit was [...] obliged to account to the court for his crime. With the entrance of Spectral Evidence, the air [...] filled with the malign spirits of those identified by good Christians as confederates of the Beast...³³²

Slander, suddenly, *could* pass for proof and calumny might dictate a sentence; ‘idle’ talk ended lives just as it would, in Miller’s world, end careers. But the precept of witch-‘spectrality’ was to find few friends outside the town and few victims after the first murderous rush: Salem’s neighbour, Andover, rose up in rebellion, emptying the courts. The proceedings of the Un-American Activities Committee, on the other hand, proved to be only one wave in a tide of persecution that would, in time, cross territorial boundaries.

By the early 1960s, the United States had cleansed its unions of socialists, decimated the ranks of its college professors, and – in Miller’s words – dried up ‘the habits of trust and toleration in public discourse’.³³³ It had also embarked on a programme of military training and investment in Central and South America. The aim of that programme, notes Alain Rouquié, ‘[était] de convertir [les] armées de défense hémisphériques en forces de l’ordre intérieur mobilisées contre la subversion communiste’. Within the U.S.

³³¹ *The Crucible in History and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 2000), p. 35.

³³² Ibid. p. 36, p. 37.

³³³ Ibid, p. 3.

Army School of the Americas, indeed, ‘20% du programme des cours pour officiers port[ait] sur le communisme’.³³⁴ Other lessons in the School’s curriculum covered strategies and techniques that might serve to unmask the enemies of the ‘free world’: murder, sabotage and extortion.³³⁵ The newly enriched armies of Latin America would soon respond to the anti-insurrectional exhortations filtering from the Pentagon, surpassing even Wisconsin’s senator in their zeal to wrench reds from under the bed. Between March 1962 and June 1966, nine (right-wing) *coups d’état* took place across the continent. And in Argentina, which witnessed two of them, the word ‘McCarthyite’ became a synonym for nationalism ‘pledged to dictatorship’.³³⁶

The bloodiest doctrine of all, however, took its name from the Elysée, not the U.S. Senate. In the 1950s and 1960s, Charles de Gaulle spoke of ‘la sale guerre’ fought by the French against the F.L.N..³³⁷ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the leaders of the Argentinean armed forces would appropriate his terms, waging their own *guerra sucia* on guerrillas, on subversives and – not infrequently – the unwary. It was, I should add, a ‘war’ to which the French lent more than phraseology. Veterans of Indochina and Algeria began to arrive at the Escuela Superior de Guerra in Buenos Aires as early as 1957; and during the presidency of Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970), exiled members of the O.A.S. were invited to Argentina to assist in the administration of integralist Catholic schools and centres.³³⁸ José López Rega, Minister of Social Welfare under Isabel Perón (1974-1976), continued the association, cultivating a shadowy network of *Massuiste*

³³⁴ *L’Etat militaire en Amérique latine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), p. 172, p. 171.

³³⁵ In September 1996, the Pentagon formally admitted that the course materials and instruction given to School of the Americas students contravened U.S., as well as international, human rights policy. This disclosure followed the discovery by journalists of S. O. A. training manuals for the period 1987-1991; the institution had, in any case, already become notorious for its role in educating Anastasio Somoza, Manuel Noriega and Leopoldo Galtieri, amongst others. (Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 9-10.)

³³⁶ David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 190.

³³⁷ Feitlowitz, p. 11.

³³⁸ By ‘integralist’, I mean, inspired by a strain of conservative religious thought whose advocates valorize hierarchy and promulgate ‘an ideal vision of medieval society where Christendom was one’. (Margaret E. Crahan, ‘National Security Ideology and Human Rights’, in *Human Rights and Basic Needs in the Americas*, ed. Crahan (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1982), pp. 100-127, (p. 123).) Integralism appeared in Algeria under the auspices of a military organization known as *Cité Catholique*, and would furnish ‘Dirty War’ apologists in Argentina with much of their ecclesiastical imagery.

‘irregulars’ along with ‘German Nazis, Italian and Yugoslavian Fascists [...] and other assorted right-wing terrorists’.³³⁹

When Isabel fell at the hands of a junta headed – initially – by Jorge Videla, Emilio Massera and Orlando Agosti, the influence of French tacticians still held sway. Ramón Camps, chief of police of Buenos Aires province for much of the period 1976-1983, explained:

En la Argentina [...] recibimos primero la influencia francesa y luego la norteamericana [...] Es necesario aclarar que el enfoque francés era más correcto que el norteamericano: aquél apuntaba a la concepción global y éste al hecho militar exclusivamente o casi exclusivamente. [...] El conflicto mundial en curso [para los franceses] no era [...] ni ideológico, ni psicológico, ni frío. [...] [Era] la guerra en la cual cada adversario emplea[ba] todas las fuerzas disponibles, violentas y no violentas, para hacer ceder al otro beligerante, conquistarlo u obligarlo a renunciar a sus objetivos políticos (VI).³⁴⁰

Camps’s comparison, in some senses, is too stark. It may be true that the version of U.S. anti-communism packaged for export was, as he avers, predominantly a military one. It may be true that North American dictates on counter-insurgency stopped short of Trinquier’s over-arching axioms: that warfare must constitute ‘un ensemble d’actions complexes de natures [...] politiques, sociales, économiques, religieuses..., armées’; that its aim must be ‘[une] emprise sur les populations’.³⁴¹ Yet what was the Frenchman’s

³³⁹ Martin Edward Anderson, *Dossier Secreto: Argentina’s Desaparecidos and the Myth of the ‘Dirty War’* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), p. 74.

³⁴⁰ *La Razón*, 1 January 1981, quoted in Andrés Avellaneda, *Censura, autoritarismo y cultura 1960-1983*, 2 vols (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Política Argentina, 1986), II: 1977-1983, p. 207. Although I have chosen, here, to focus on the impact of French and North-American practice, there were of course precedents for human rights abuse in Argentina itself. Formally outlawed by the 1853 Constitution with the words, ‘quedan abolidos para siempre la pena de muerte por causas políticas, toda especie de tormento, los azotes’ (LIV), corporal punishments such as whipping remained a frequent occurrence in schools, prisons, barracks and *estancias* for several decades afterwards. The early years of the twentieth century were, as I noted earlier, marked by political massacres, and it would not be long before torture, too, became a routine feature in domestic power struggles. In 1931, a visitor to a Buenos Aires penitentiary inspected ‘un aparato que [...] había servido para torcer los testículos [...], una prensa que se utilizaba para apretar los dedos, [y] un cinturón de cuero con el que se hacía presión en el cuerpo y al que llamaban camisa de fuerza’ (LV). The infamous *picana* or cattle prod made its appearance in 1934, and Senate hearings on torture took place in 1946, 1949, 1953, 1956 and 1961, prompting one senator to remark, ‘el mal no es actual, [...] es una costumbre inveterada’ (LVI). (Ricardo Rodríguez Molas, *Historia de la tortura y el orden represivo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1985), p. 66, p. 96, p. 131.)

³⁴¹ *La Guerre*, p. 112, p. 74.

vision, if not a re-formulation of the worst excesses of McCarthyism, a ‘rational’ extension of the purges to which disaffiliated liberals, as well as ‘fellow-travellers’, fell prey? ‘Tout individu, toute organisation, qui, d’une façon quelconque, favoriseraient les desseins de l’adversaire seront considérés comme des ennemis et traités comme tels,’ wrote Trinquier.³⁴² Any U.S. citizen who refused to sign McCarthy’s pledge of loyalty would be ignominiously jettisoned from a job. And in *The Crucible*, saying ‘no’ to confession is also saying ‘no’ to life.

‘I have no doubt,’ Miller observes, ‘that people *were* communing with, and even worshipping, the Devil in Salem [in 1692]’.³⁴³ Every authority of the time confirmed the existence of witches; the playwright’s own historical research brought up evidence of spell casting and sorcery. In 1970s Argentina, the agents – and the proof – of socialist revolution seemed equally real. Two leftist groups, the Peronist *Montoneros* and the Trotskyite *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*, mounted kidnaps, robberies and assassinations in the early years of the decade, including, in 1970, the execution of former president Pedro Aramburu. Both groups proclaimed their intention of ‘attracting mass support and [...] intensifying guerrilla activities in a succession of stages or “leaps” (*saltos*)’.³⁴⁴ Neither succeeded. By 1976, their numbers were on the decline. By 1978, they had been crushed, tracked down and dispersed by the right-wing paramilitaries who flourished under López Rega and later, by government counter-terrorist squads. Yet the armed forces ‘perpetuated [...] the myth of a subversive threat, *even*,’ as Marcelo Suárez-Orozco stresses, ‘*after the armed left had been virtually annihilated in the field, [...] [and] innocent civilians continued to be haunted in the name of “national security”*’.³⁴⁵

³⁴² Ibid, p. 160.

³⁴³ *The Crucible*, p. 39.

³⁴⁴ David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín*, (rev. edn., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 354.

³⁴⁵ ‘A Grammar of Terror: Psychocultural Responses to State Terrorism in Dirty War and Post-Dirty War Argentina’, in *The Paths to Domination, Resistance and Terror*, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and Jo Ann Martin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 219-259 (p. 232). In this respect, Argentina’s government was, effectively, emulating that of the U.S.A. – which also sustained fables of Communist aggression long after the threat had passed. As late as 1958, John F. Kennedy would warn his compatriots that they were about to lose ‘[their] superiority in nuclear striking power’; and a 1960 Democrat campaign tract declared, ‘time is running out’. (Quoted in John Kenneth White, *Still Seeing Red: How the Cold War Shapes the New American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), p. 156.) By this point, however, American reconnaissance missions had established that the country’s nuclear capabilities exceeded those of the Soviet Union by a ratio of approximately twenty to one.

Suárez-Orozco's turn of phrase is apposite. The struggle against terrorism quickly became a crusade against 'wandering spirits', a witch-hunt which far eclipsed the Un-American Activities Committee's in magnitude and horror. 'The accusations of Communist Party membership aimed at [...] [Hollywood] writers, actors and directors never mentioned treasonous *acts*,' claimed Miller; 'what was in their brains was the question, and this created a kind of gestural phantom-land'.³⁴⁶ Under Videla, Massera, and Agosti, another such 'phantom-land' grew up: a land in which 'living ghosts' proved indistinguishable from living people, and the slightest suspicion was tantamount to evidence. Argentina's citizens, like Salem's, would be answerable for 'paranormal' crimes. 'El terrorista,' declared Videla, 'no sólo es considerado tal por matar con un arma o colocar una bomba, sino también por activar a través de ideas contrarias a nuestra civilización occidental y cristiana' (VII).³⁴⁷ His Minister of Labour, General Liendo, made the point still clearer. '*Aquellos que se apartan del normal desarrollo del "Proceso" [...] se convierten en cómplices de esa subversión que debemos destruir, lo mismo que a quienes no se atreven a asumir las responsabilidades que esta situación impone*' (VIII).³⁴⁸

As in Salem, the failure to participate was felony in itself. And as in Salem, participation required information: crudely put, a list of names. The efficacy of Videla's *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* came to be determined by the number of enemies its advocates 'exposed', by the number of 'colleagues' its victims sold to save themselves. After 1977, the Argentinean secret services no longer gathered their intelligence from undercover sources. They simply arrested anyone mentioned during interrogation, under torture. In certain cases, learned the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*, 'bastaba figurar en una agenda de teléfonos para pasar [...] a ser "blanco"' (IX).³⁴⁹ Some 30,000 individuals perished between 1976 and 1983. Two million more left the country, fearful for their safety. Of those who died, many were trade unionists or students, and most were under twenty-five. Others were friends and relatives of dissidents on the run. Even an adhesion to the tenets of Freud and Einstein could constitute a capital offence;

³⁴⁶ *The Crucible in History*, pp. 27-28, my emphasis.

³⁴⁷ *Diario Popular*, 18 December 1977, quoted in Avellaneda, p. 163.

³⁴⁸ *La Nación*, 12 November 1977, quoted in Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *Nunca Más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1984), p. 375.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 63.

the one, after all, had ‘undermined the Christian family’, the other, ‘Christian notions of time and space’.³⁵⁰

The junta’s own concepts of time and space were, however, scarcely orthodox. ‘My watch has stopped’, Videla told journalists immediately before the coup. If his intention, then, was solely to infer that the politicians’ turn was over – that his ‘deadline for action [...] had been reached’ – his words would nonetheless prove prescient in other ways; for *la guerra sucia*, to those who afterwards declared it, lay outside history, outside chronology, ‘anterior a [la] política’.³⁵¹ It was a battle for the human psyche, a campaign in the name of an Occident that was no geographical delimitation but a creed. Massera, the regime’s great orator, conjured Manichean visions of the global conflict. To serve the *Proceso* was to raise the standard of God and Right. To oppose it, in his mind, was to fly the colours of damnation:

Lo cierto [...] es que aquí y en todo el mundo, en estos momentos, luchan los que están a favor de la muerte y los que estamos a favor de la vida. [...] Estamos combatiendo contra nihilistas, contra delirantes de destrucción. [...] [Y] no vamos a combatir hasta la muerte, vamos a combatir hasta la victoria, esté más allá o más acá de la muerte (X).³⁵²

The architects of Argentina’s garrison-state, it appears, considered themselves besieged by hell. Yet Massera’s insistence on *invoking* the legions of death is telling; and the ‘logic’ behind ‘National Reorganization’ grew strangely circular. ‘On n’est occupé par les fantômes qu’en étant occupé à les exorciser,’ writes Derrida. ‘On se met à [leur] poursuite [...] pour le[s] faire fuir, mais on le[s] fait fuir, [...] on [les] expulse pour le[s] chercher encore et rester à [leur] poursuite’.³⁵³ It is an equally apt description of the 1970s’ (autotelic) onslaught on revolt, of a blitz on sedition that brought down rebel after rebel merely to ‘find’ their like, once more, lurking in the shadows.

Subversives, for the P.R.N., would always remain a danger and a quarry. The exorcism of the individual ‘terrorist’ was, by contrast, to be absolute. Each one would be effaced

³⁵⁰ Feitlowitz, p. 98.

³⁵¹ John Simpson and Jana Bennett, *The Disappeared: Voices from a Secret War* (London: Robson Books, 1985), p. 37; Emilio Massera, ‘[En memoria de los] “Muertos por por la Patria y en Actos del Servicio”’, speech delivered on 2 November 1976 and reprinted in Enrique Vázquez, *PRN La última: Origen, apogeo y caída de la dictadura militar*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1985), pp. 236-238 (p. 237).

³⁵² Ibid, pp. 237-238.

³⁵³ *Spectres*, p. 223, p. 222.

from the ‘battlefield’ as though he had never been summoned there, as though the rite of adjuration and extrusion were itself a kind of phantasm. Argentinean torturers, like their French counterparts, sought to leave no testament to the cruelty that had been inflicted. They, too, favoured water and electricity – the *submarino*, the *picana*, the *casco de la muerte* (a cap wired with electrodes), the simple cable, shorn of insulation. Techniques, however, had improved. Now, the prisoner could not cry out. ‘Utilizaban un aparato de alta potencia que, cuando era aplicado, provocaba la contracción de la lengua’ (XI). He could not see, since his eyes were blindfolded from the first moment of abduction. He lost his sense of place, of self. ‘Un miércoles de traslado pido a gritos que me traslade: “A mí..., a mí..., 571” [...] ya no era Lisandro Raúl Cubas, era un número’ (XII).³⁵⁴ When he was ‘transferred’, to a mass grave, to a live burial at sea, [he] would be stripped of anything that might identify [him], [his] face [...] disfigured and [his] jaw broken to prevent [his] being recognized even from dental records’.³⁵⁵

Members of the general public were encouraged to testify to their neighbours’ fear or flight.³⁵⁶ ‘Disappearances’, on the other hand, might be orchestrated to preclude third-party witness. ‘Unusually for the heavily [...] patrolled Argentina of the day, the areas where [...] abductions took place were’, Eduardo Crawley states, ‘conspicuously lacking in police presence’; ‘increasingly, the arrests seemed to have been carried out by phantoms’.³⁵⁷ No references to torture marred the run of nightly news. These, in Salem’s terms, must prove ‘invisible crimes’, atrocities to be defended only by the abuser, depravities to be denounced by the abused alone. Around them rose a culture of denial. ‘To my surprise’, notes oral historian Marguerite Feitlowitz, the paradox ‘*I was there; I saw it; I couldn’t have known a thing* [...] emerged as a significant pattern in [...] interviews [with] Argentines [who] saw kidnappings’. ‘El silencio es salud’ (XIII), she adds, became a slogan of the time.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ *Nunca más*, p. 40, p. 60.

³⁵⁵ Simpson and Bennett, p. 111.

³⁵⁶ Thus Alicia Partnoy, a survivor of the detention camps, recalls, ‘one morning while on the bus I heard on the radio: “Fellow citizens, if you notice family groups travelling at odd hours of the day or night, report them to the military authorities. The number to call is...”’ (*The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina*, trans. Alicia Partnoy, Lois Athey & Sandra Braunstein (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1986; repr. London: Virago, 1988), p. 78.)

³⁵⁷ *A House Divided Argentina, 1880-1980* (London: C. Hurst, 1984), p. 414, p. 426.

³⁵⁸ *A Lexicon of Terror*, p. 151, p. 34.

Even the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, whose protests won international plaudits, failed to impinge upon the consciousness of many. As Irene, the main character in a 1981 novel by Marta Traba, understood, ‘*se borraba del mapa la Plaza de Mayo durante las dos o tres horas de las habituales manifestaciones de los jueves*’ (XIV). As her compatriot, Dolores, expanded, ‘los de la tevé son los únicos muertos a que ten[ían] derecho’ (XV).³⁵⁹ Yet when totalitarianism was, finally, ousted, the ‘disappeared’ would not go un-represented at its wake. Twenty-four hours before President Alfonsín’s inauguration, in December 1983, ‘hundreds of posters began to appear on the walls and hoardings of Buenos Aires. Eerie, crude, ghost-like almost, they showed simply the hand-drawn outline of a life-sized human figure, with no features and no indication of age or sex’ (figures 10 and 11).³⁶⁰ ‘Spectral evidence’, it seemed, had assumed new forms.

JOURNEYS IN THE UNKNOWN: *COMO EN LA GUERRA*

Witchcraft, in *The Crucible*, is a charge to which its convicts often proffer no reply. A man prefers to die from torture, rather than taint his name with ‘aye or nay to his indictment’. A woman languishes three months in gaol without a word. Silence, to Miller’s eyes, remains the only privilege of the suspect, a ‘boon’ with which socialists, too, would think to save some dignity. ‘On the idealistic canon of their own convictions, the defendants [at Un-American Committee hearings] were,’ he observes, ‘largely mute’.³⁶¹ For the novelist Luisa Valenzuela, accusations of deviance bring different dues. ‘Brujas’, in her mind, gain licence to *voice* the discontentment of their time, to articulate the chagrin of their sex and status:

Brujas como aquella a la que hace referencia Pennethorne Hughes en el libro *La brujería*: ‘El ama de llaves de Alice Kyteler, Petronilla de Heath, confirmó los cargos por lo cual fue necesario azotarla seis veces más siguiendo las instrucciones del obispo. Cuando lo poco que quedaba de ella fue de nuevo llevado a prisión para que se la azotase por séptima vez confirmó todo lo que los jueces quisieron. Fue conducida a la ciudad y quemada públicamente, mientras juraba contra el clero y despreciaba y maldecía a los verdugos’ (XVI).

³⁵⁹ *Conversación al sur* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1981), p. 87, p. 55.

³⁶⁰ Simpson and Bennett, p. 387.

³⁶¹ *The Crucible*, p. 117; *The Crucible in History*, p. 29.

Condemnation, deduces Valenzuela, unshackles that same errant 'spirit' which judge, priest, and burning victim fought to suppress, affording the latter a sudden – anti-Christian – epiphany, 'un momento de libertad para expresarse con toda fuerza antes de la muerte' (XVII).³⁶² Petronilla de Heath, meekly compliant, subservient to those who claimed to do God's work, turns, at the last, on her tormentors.

The choice of a female exemplum, a Petronilla and not (say) a Petronius, is hardly arbitrary. Valenzuela's objective, here, is an exploration of convention's ghostly 'Other'; and her interest lies, like Djebbar's, with the most familiar of all un-'familiar's', with woman. Is there, asks this essay – could there be – cause to posit the existence of *lenguaje femenino*? 'La respuesta,' its author suggests, 'habría que tratar de concretarla por el lado de las brujas: aquello en lo que no se cree – o quisiera no creerse o no se pudiera creer – pero que las hay, las hay' (XVIII).³⁶³ The 'feminine' tongue, for Valenzuela, is an article of faith as strong as any which led Miller's martyrs to their doom, *and* a casualty of the years that came to separate ourselves from Salem, driving a wedge between sceptical modernity and its less than 'reasonable' past. What was once plausible to the many now strikes them as incredible. What was once audible to the many now falls on deaf ears; and just as witches left little trace in annals but the record of their immolation, women, too, have withered without testament from history. They are the inhabitants of those dead peripheries marked 'here there be crows', or rather, 'here there be crones', the ash that settled soundlessly round sites of stakes and pyres. 'We have', the Argentinean elsewhere remarks, 'been talked into the idea of being part of Mother Earth: the woman [...] as the *terra incognita*'.³⁶⁴

To un-earth femininity – to assert its (sup)presence – would, she opines, be also to re-ground it, to bind the flow of syntax to the viscera and rhythms of the female physique: to write, in her words, 'with' the body. And writing with the body, to Valenzuela, proves indissociable from writing 'with' repugnance, exhibiting *un regodeo en el asco*, an absorption (even 'perverse' pleasure) in disgust; in menstrual blood and trails of slime. 'Escribir con el cuerpo quiere decir – en parte [...] – no salir huyendo de aquellos impulsos que minan

³⁶² 'Mis brujas favoritas', p. 91.

³⁶³ Ibid, p. 88.

³⁶⁴ 'The Other Face of the Phallus', in Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia, eds., *Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 242-248 (p. 242).

al raciocinio puro y lo tuercen y lo contaminan' (IXX).³⁶⁵ What forces Petronilla to make her mark on Hughes's chronicles, one might conjecture, is the confrontation with her own torched members, with the ghastly reality of charring flesh. Bound to obscenity by ropes and fetters, the 'sorceress' embraces it. Her reaction, moreover, figures *in extremis* the chemical responses that Valenzuela does enjoin all women to promote. '[We must] inject estrogens in our writing [...] with force and subversion – with fury if necessary'.³⁶⁶ Or, as an earlier text implies, '[we must] be conscious of our bodies [...] It will be [...] a way of defending our own dark desires, our fantasies, [...] our phantoms as well. Especially those not thought to be "feminine"'.³⁶⁷

Valenzuela's emphasis on the sexing of the sign – in Irigarayan terms, *la sexuation du discours* – can, at times, carry her thoughts close to the Frenchwoman's. Both, it is clear, strive to access and denounce 'ce qui devait rester occulté: le recouvrement d'une possible opération du féminin dans le langage'. Both, in their fashion, retain an engagement with psychoanalysis, which rendered woman '[son] "continent noir"', with Freud, '[qui dit] en être resté à la "préhistoire"'.³⁶⁸ But where Luce Irigaray speaks of outing patriarchal blind spots 'par un effet de répétition *ludique*', Luisa Valenzuela eschews such epithets; in Argentinean hands, *le jeu de la mimésis* seems deadly serious. Where Irigaray turns down questions of any *parler-femme des hommes* ('est-ce [...] à moi de parler de l'"autre" homme?'), Valenzuela, mired by tyranny, takes the 'feminine' to a male nadir.³⁶⁹ The 'Dirty War' was a 'conflict' in which women participated as much as men.³⁷⁰ It was a conflict in which the novelist herself saw peril, aiding 'un grupo de personas que

³⁶⁵ Gwendolyn Díaz, 'Entrevista a Luisa Valenzuela', in Gwendolyn Díaz and María Inés Lagos, eds., *La palabra en vilo: narrativa de Luisa Valenzuela* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 1996), pp. 27-52 (p. 29).

³⁶⁶ 'The Other Face', p. 243.

³⁶⁷ 'The Word, That Milk Cow', in Doris Meyer and Margarite Fernández Olmos, eds., *Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America*, 2 vols (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983), I: *Introductory Essays*, pp. 96-97 (p. 97).

³⁶⁸ Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, p. 74. Valenzuela's engagement with psychoanalysis has, it should be added, particular resonance in the Argentine context. During the 'Dirty War', Argentina had – and still has – 'more psychologists per capita than any other industrialized nation'; it remains 'the most important centre outside of France for Lacanian psychology' (Feitlowitz, p. 35).

³⁶⁹ *Ce sexe*, p. 46, p. 47, p. 133.

³⁷⁰ 'All the guerilla bands', as David Rock points out, 'had a high proportion of female combatants'; all the detention camps had a high proportion of female inmates. (*Argentina 1916-1987*, p. 354.)

estaba protegiendo a gente perseguida' (XX).³⁷¹ It was also a conflict in which men emasculated other men, 'taunted [them] about their manhood, about the sizes of their penises, [...] about circumcision', applied 'electric current [...] to [their] testicles'.³⁷² A conflict, in short, where the suffering of either sex might, and would, provoke 'bad language'.

DEPARTURE, DISLOCATION, DISRUPTION

The *desaparecida* of Valenzuela's 1977 novel *Como en la guerra* appears explicitly linked to occultism's extirpation, to that string of human bonfires who set ablaze the volumes of *La brujería*. 'Le digo', expostulates one (former) acquaintance, 'que ella es una bruja [...] Ojalá existiera la Inquisición, ahora, buena falta hace una mano dura para darle a ella' (XXI).³⁷³ In a way, I should add, she comes, as Petronilla did, to the attention of an inquisitor, an analyst bent on wringing forth confessions which will bring neither redemption nor – in lasting terms – release; which lead her, ultimately, to the morbid contemplation of the body in pain. We never know what becomes of this unnamed woman. We never see the flames that consume her, never see what 'priest' puts spark to wood. We do hear a gasp of wrath, an outraged affirmation of the loss of flesh and blood. For whilst she limits herself, in the main, to owning the pathologies that her confessor wants to hear, a searing revelation gives the lie to dreams of castration, of envy, of totemic feasts, refuting them in echo of a curse which long ago made mock of 'guilty' pleas. The 'affliction' that dominates her twilight hours – the 'actuality' that draws her, eventually, exclusively into itself – is historical, not neurotic: '[un tiempo] cuando ella y su hermana gemela [...] peleaban [juntas] [...] Después no, ya no, atadas de pies y manos y humilladas. Entonces la imposibilidad de hacer nada y [...] el perder de vista' (p. 81, XXII).

³⁷¹ Díaz, 'Entrevista', p. 33. Valenzuela subsequently went into exile, accepting a post at Columbia University in 1978.

³⁷² Jean Franco, 'Gender, Death, and Resistance: Facing the Ethical Vacuum', in *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*, ed. Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen and Manuel Antonio Garretón (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 104-118 (p. 107).

³⁷³ *Como en la guerra* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1977), p. 47. Since this novel is still incomplete in its Argentinean edition, I have also drawn on Helen Lane's English translation, *He Who Searches* (Elmwood Park, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1988). References to the original are given in the body of the text; references to the translation, in footnotes.

Yet if Petronilla de Heath is genuinely to find some counterpart amongst a cast of Argentinean misfits, it is not the woman, but AZ, the analyst, the male narrator. *Como en la guerra*, in fact, opens with his final – defiant – throes. ‘I wasn’t there. I don’t know anything, I swear I had nothing to do with her’. ‘You fag priest, you fruit, you little egghead. [...] Talk.’ Despite the urgency of the injunction, the reply is as irrelevant as Petronilla’s once had been. The executioner carries on his task, raping AZ with the barrel of a gun, twisting it into the dying man’s guts until the bullet hits home.

IMGOINGTOPULLTHETRIGGERNOW echoes everywhere surrounds me it’s become an acoustic chamber triggernow triggernow the walls send back to me and I’ll get even with the walls I’ll explode on them and spatter shit all over them. What a great consolation. What a marvellous splattering when he pulls the triggernow triggernow triggernow³⁷⁴

Vivid enough in its depiction of torture to have attracted the scrutiny of the censors, this strange ‘flash-forward’ remains excised from every Spanish copy of the book. There is little sign, in Argentina’s libraries, of an episode that shows a man at mercy to the act of violation: a man sodomized, feminized, disgraced. Valenzuela dubs it ‘página cero’ (XXIII), the instant which eludes chronometry, ‘[qui] n’arrive pas, [qui] ne survient pas’.³⁷⁵

For Derrida, whose words those are, the apparition is invariably a portent. ‘Au fond, le spectre, c’est l’avenir, il est toujours à venir, il ne se présente que comme ce qui pourrait venir ou re-venir.’ *Hamlet*, he contends, plays in and on anticipation of this harbinger of ‘coming threats’, this augur of menaces that seem to belong to the past, but which might one day, in the future, raise their heads again. ‘[Le revenant] va finir par arriver. [...] Il ne saurait tarder. Comme il tarde. [...] Tout s’ouvre dans l’imminence d’une ré-apparition, mais de la réapparition du spectre comme apparition *pour la première fois dans la pièce*’.³⁷⁶ The paradoxes that proliferate here, in Derrida’s dense prose, are also paradoxes that *Como en la guerra* puts to use. An image of the victim quivers momentarily, there, before us, ‘dead below the eyebrows’.³⁷⁷ Then the novel proper begins – begins, as Derrida would have it, by the ‘waiting’ for martyrdom: for ‘the thing’ which will end up coming, which must end up coming. Without ‘página cero’, Valenzuela’s text proves baffling, an

³⁷⁴ *He Who Searches*, p. 5, p. 6.

³⁷⁵ Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 22.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 71, p. 22.

³⁷⁷ *He Who Searches*, p. 6.

exercise in suspense denuded almost of all sense, as though the imprint of the ‘father’s spirit’ had shrunk to a single stage direction, ‘*The Ghost cries under the stage*’ (I.5.157). Without ‘página cero’, AZ’s ordeals consist of nothing more ‘graphic’ than incursions into irreality, expeditions in ‘[un] espacio [que] no es el euclidiano [...] [y un] tiempo [que no es] éste del que tenemos una pobre conciencia al ver envejecer nuestro pellejo’ (p. 145, XXIV).

Perhaps, indeed, the future tense of the flash-forward is a present future: a now-as-well-as-later that ‘explains’ and contains AZ’s mythic voyages, that subjugates them to its own ‘disjointed’ (a-)horology. ‘The hand is the vehicle,’ exclaims the torture victim, ‘it is not easy to be transported by it to the bottom of things and enter a diffuse world where I reshape and recompose myself.’³⁷⁸ But he does, arguably, find ‘transport’ in the impact of the strongman’s fist. ‘We are led to surmise that the remainder of the text actually takes place in the narrator’s mind just before he is killed as he seeks to reshape and recompose’; ‘the journey[s] [themselves]’, notes Sharon Magnarelli, ‘[are] [...] a form of escape’.³⁷⁹ Where Assia Djebar’s battered heroine took refuge in the recitation of her mother’s remedies, AZ, in this reading, tells a longer tale. He takes us on a path that leads from his own consulting rooms in Barcelona, to the ‘*capilla ardiente de [los] demonios*’ in Mexico’s peyote hills (p. 138, XXV), and on, to the Tucumán jungle, to the streets of Buenos Aires. His career veers from psychoanalyst to kamikaze bomber, the object of his quest, from prostitute to effigy, from witch to embalmed virgin ‘mother’.

It is not hard to grasp why Magnarelli lays a case for *Como en la guerra* as the travelogue of mental flight. AZ’s job in Spain, after all, is to make him from the first an arbiter and explorer of each nuance of repression, the propagandist of ‘[a] term that [in itself] evokes [...] image[s] of a subject actively pushing [some] unwanted [...] memory away’. By dint of psychoanalytic training, we might say, he is ‘conditioned’ to credit – then employ – a model of the mind-in-shock which ‘removes’ traumatic recollections, leaving ‘personal consciousness in [...] place’, in stead. And that model, state the clinicians Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, is ‘vertically layered’. ‘[In much analytic literature on trauma] what is repressed is pushed downward, into the unconscious. [...] Only symbolic, indirect indications would point to its assumed existence.’³⁸⁰ Their view has had

³⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

³⁷⁹ *Reflections/Refractions*, p. 96.

³⁸⁰ ‘The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma’, in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 158-182 (p. 168).

a parallel in more than one critique of Valenzuela. ‘In [the Argentinean’s] work’, writes Stephen Hart, the horrors of the 1970s ‘operate within the text as a reality which exists in “the other scene” [...] beneath [...] explicit scenes of [...] passion’; a reality distorted, displaced, ‘reshaped’. A reality confined – in an ‘immediate’ guise at least – to the expurgated paragraphs of ‘página cero’.³⁸¹

AZ’s dealings with others, fittingly, show him everywhere resolved to follow oblique ‘indications’ to the source of some ‘assumed’ and covert truth. Miseries, desires, even virtues: all these, to him, are facts, in Foucault’s words, “[qui] ne “demande[nt]” qu’à se faire jour”, ‘[que l’on] débusque dans l’âme’, *dans l’inconscient*.³⁸² As an analyst, he posits certain, curbed, ‘conflictual wishes’ and then purports to stumble on the properties which had *a priori* been supposed, treating anomaly with the aid of a pre-determined ‘cuadro patológico’ (p. 118, XXVI). As a communicant, he colludes in the canonization of a woman who intrigues him, afterwards acclaims her as a saint raised up by God, exclaiming ‘¡es ella! [...] es ella, la santa, por fin el milagro’ (p. 195, XXVII).³⁸³ As a seeker, he has teased out his ‘conclusion’ before he embarks on the inquiries that distract both him and us from anguish. ‘El descubrimiento’ (chapter 1) precedes ‘El viaje’ (chapter 3) and ‘El encuentro’ (chapter 4) (XXVIII); and Valenzuela’s protagonist, at times, emerges almost as a parody of his predecessor, the Viennese doctor who ‘pressured’ analysands to ‘produce narratives congruent with his theories’. ‘When the patient’s memories did not satisfy the therapist’s expectations of traumatic causation, [the Austrian] explained, “We tell [her] that this experience explains nothing, but that behind it there must be hidden a more significant, earlier experience”’.³⁸⁴

Sigmund Freud, of course, lost many of his prized ‘narrators’. ‘Dora’ fled from therapy less than three months in, sick of yarns of fear and incest. The shell-shocked veteran of World War I failed, for the most part, to respond to treatment, re-living the minutiae of combat in nightmares, in flashbacks that no session on the couch could stop. The one

³⁸¹ *The Other Scene: Psychoanalytic Readings in Modern Spanish and Latin-American Literature* (Boulder: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1991), p. 74.

³⁸² *Histoire de la sexualité*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1976-1984), I: *La Volonté de savoir* (1976), p. 80. p. 79.

³⁸³ The *bruja/desaparecida*, in fact, is strongly identified with Eva Perón, who appeared on popular postcards under a halo and of whom Tomás Eloy Martínez tell us: ‘Entre mayo de 1952 – dos meses antes de que muriera – y julio de 1954, el Vaticano recibió casi cuarenta mil cartas de laicos atribuyendo a Evita varios milagros y exigiendo que el Papa la canonizara’. (*Santa Evita* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1995), p. 66, LVII.)

³⁸⁴ Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador, 1997), pp. 41-42.

has since become a feminist *cause célèbre*, a focus for all those who would revise '[les] hypothèses sur la sexualité de la femme [...] prescrites par des paramètres masculins', who would re-traverse the terrain of analysis's *continent noir*.³⁸⁵ The other, though, might tell us more about AZ's loss – 'La pérdida' of chapter 2 (XXIX), the exit of his sole anonymous client. For Freud, the 'resistance' exhibited by soldiers was a mark of unenlightenment.

Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident [...] This astonishes people far too little. [...] Anyone who accepts it as something self-evident that dreams should put them back at night into the situation that caused them to fall ill has misunderstood the nature of dreams.³⁸⁶

Feasibly, however, it is he who has misunderstood the nature of trauma: for that 'neurosis', argues Cathy Caruth, is not in practice 'a pathology [...] of falsehood or displacement of meaning, but [a symptom] of history itself'. What she calls 'post-traumatic stress disorder' lies outside the field of fantasy and wishes; and the 'dream' of vulnerability *reproduces* rather than distorts an agonizing event. 'Modern analysts [...] have remarked on the [...] *literality* and nonsymbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks, which [must] resist cure to the extent that they remain, precisely, literal.'³⁸⁷

Literality, I would suggest, is a 'trope' that can bring the edifice of 'unconscious' meaning crashing down around the analyst in more ways than one. AZ never 'heals' the woman because he persists in seeking childhood dramas where adult abuse alone has wreaked some havoc. But he too will fall prey to 'disorder', as he here and there intuits. 'Tengo miedo de dispersarme, de no saber diagnosticar mi mal, [...] tengo miedo de integrarme a ella' (p. 118, XXX). *Como en la guerra*, it transpires, is peppered with indicia of 'integration' in another's torment, with signs of re-enactment or possession. And

³⁸⁵ Irigaray, p. 47.

³⁸⁶ *Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis. Beyond the Pleasure Principle, the Ego and the Id and Other Works*, ed. Angela Richards, trans. James Strachey, The Penguin Freud Library, 11 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 282-283.

³⁸⁷ 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in *Trauma*, pp. 4-12 (p. 5). Ruth Leys makes a case for the use of the term 'veridical' rather than 'literal', noting, 'one might want to assert on the basis of the evidence that traumatic dreams are veridical, in the sense that they accurately reflect or depict or express the traumatic origin, without embracing the view that they have passed beyond representation', that they are, so to speak, 'literal' (*Trauma: A Genealogy*, p. 229). Since I am here extrapolating from Caruth's reading of Freud, I have, however, chosen to retain *her* terminology.

where AZ is concerned, maybe, the story of the train collision bears reprisal. The man who left intact, and subsequently suffered, Freud proclaimed, ‘now ha[d] a “traumatic neurosis”’. ‘*It [was] a quite unintelligible – that is to say, a new [or novel] – fact.*’³⁸⁸ To Valenzuela’s ‘victim’, his own ‘motor’ symptoms and upheavals seem equally abstruse. He goes to Formosa, where the *Montoneros* stormed a fort in ’75, without knowing why. He goes to Buenos Aires, where a second ‘keep’ stands tall against the taking, without knowing why. ‘*Si AZ conociera estos detalles,*’ interjects an authorial voice, ‘*si él hubiera tenido acceso a cierta información, su [...] tortura, [...] y hasta quizá su muerte, habrían tenido para él una razón de ser*’ (p. 92, p. 93, XXXI). If he had had access to certain information, his torture, perhaps even his death, would have gained a rationale, a reason for being. Yet he did not.

RESTITUTIO AD INTEGRUM?

In a prefatory note to the book that contains his musings on delayed disturbance, Freud tells us how their publication would, in turn, be ‘realized’ belatedly. *Moses and Monotheism*, he says, was issued in its earliest incarnation in truncated form alone:

At [that] [...] date [1937] I was living under the protection of the Catholic Church, and was afraid that the publication of my work would result in the loss of that protection. [...] Then, suddenly, came the German invasion. [...] In the certainty that I should now be persecuted, [...] I left the city which [...] had been my home for seventy-eight years.

Only when he arrived in England in 1938 did the psychoanalyst ‘venture to bring the last portion of [his] work before the public’, setting out in full the theses ‘[that had] tormented [him] like an unlaidd ghost’.³⁸⁹ For Caruth, who (re)cites these ‘circumstantial’ specificities, the period prior to exile and hence, to the ‘palliative’ composition of a tract on latency, was itself one of incubation. The interlude between the first (incomplete) edition of *Moses* and the second ‘mark[ed] the space of a trauma, a trauma not [...] [merely] denoted by the words “German invasion,” but rather borne by the words *verliess ich*, “I left”’. Freud’s text, she continues, ‘preserved’ the realities of persecution – the persecution of his race, of his family, of his profession – ‘within the words of his leaving,

³⁸⁸ *The Origins of Religion*, p. 309 (my italics).

³⁸⁹ *The Origins of Religion*, p. 298, p. 349.

words that do not simply refer, but, through their repetition [...] convey the impact of a history precisely as what *cannot be grasped* about leaving'.³⁹⁰

The preface, as Caruth indicates, is not the sole place where Freud insists, conspicuously, on decampment. Later, in the 'Summary and Recapitulation', he paraphrases, 'then, in March 1938, came the unexpected German invasion, which forced me to leave my home'.³⁹¹ And in the story of the train crash, 'the trauma of the accident, its very unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure'; the man undergoes the event and leaves, ostensibly unharmed. It is his departure, moreover, which alerts us to the most enigmatic aspect of the shock-syndrome, 'not [...] the period of forgetting that occurs after[wards], but [...] the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself: the fact that, somehow, antipathic experience came to be severed off, dissociated from cognizance, from apprehension, rather than repressed. 'Leaving', to put it another way, functions as a motif for the first – unsettling – moment of opacity, as well as its traumatic iteration: the cry, 'I left', 'I left', which runs through *Moses* like a puzzled refrain, which echoes across the pages of *Como en la guerra*.³⁹² For AZ, too, is constantly departing. 'Allá voy, he notes, in nonplussed tones, 'allá voy, allá' (p. 129, XXXII). 'Subo, bajo'; 'estoy hecho para andar en la noche' (p. 145, XXXIII).

Clinically, such breaks in comprehension would confute the theory of a self shaped 'up-to-down', the model of the psyche that stores trauma with forbidden impulse, with desire. 'Dissociation' – the 'evacuation' of awareness from the scene cum re-seen of disturbance – 'reflects a horizontally layered model of [the] mind', and not a polar axis. 'When a subject does not remember a trauma', write van der Kolk and van der Hart, 'its "memory" is contained in an alternative stream of consciousness, which may be subconscious or dominate consciousness, e.g., during [...] reenactments'.³⁹³ The traumatic episode, to quote again from Derrida, 'est quelque chose qu'on ne sait pas [...] non par ignorance, mais parce que ce présent non présent [...] ne relève plus du savoir. Du moins plus de ce qu'on croit savoir sous le nom de savoir'. 'Página cero's 'apparition' of horror, of the body dis-incarnated, eviscerated, was never 'under the stage' at all; never needed to be elevated to the battlements before the tragedy we foresaw could get in

³⁹⁰ *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 21.

³⁹¹ *The Origins of Religion*, p. 349

³⁹² *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 22, p. 17.

³⁹³ 'The Intrusive Past', p. 168.

motion. It was there throughout, is there throughout, 'hors de toute synchronie, avant même et au-delà de tout regard de notre part'.³⁹⁴

In some strange manner, then, the censors turn out to have done themselves no favour, allowing the 'latent' drama of Argentina to play on, suppressing solely the coda where they thought to wipe the climax. *Como en la guerra* is arcane and bemusing from the outset on page one, a mesh of digressions, of dreamscapes and outlandish, oddball, 'cameos'. The 'author' herself debars all deduction from AZ's 'Loss', his 'Journey', his 'Encounter', railing waspishly against '*lo intolerable: la causa que justifica los efectos, la explicación racional infiltrándose en medio de toda la irracionalidad que implica la conducta humana*' (p. 93, XXXIV). Yet the novel remains a surprisingly 'logical' reflection of its time, its birthplace – for surely, the history of the Argentine dictatorship is precisely the history of a *trauma*, of suspense without sense, of fear without the detail to permit informed responses.³⁹⁵ The 'irreality' that comes to define this turbulent odyssey, in other words, mirrors the lived reality of the average Argentinean: the psychical disruption of the man who leaves the scene of a 'frightful accident [...] apparently uninjured', mouthing *I was there; I saw it; I couldn't have known a thing*.³⁹⁶

More than a testament to repression or dissociation, though, *Como en la guerra* is a chronicle of the long-term consequences of 'stress disorder'; of the 'licuefacción de [la] persona' (p. 118, XXXV) which may occur under the impact of protracted inscience and possession. 'Tengo miedo', claims the *bruja*, 'de ser sólo un fantasma en el recuerdo' (p. 71, XXXVI). But she is not the one who starts to flicker 'on and off' uncertainly, whose ego proves only a poor stave against mnemonic fog. That fate, rather, befalls her analyst: condemned, in Breton's phrase, to play a phantom's part, 'à revenir sur [ses] pas, [...] à essayer de connaître ce qu'[il] devrai[t] fort bien reconnaître, à apprendre une faible partie de ce qu'[il] a oublié'.³⁹⁷ His 'subjectivity', like that of the French surrealist, like that of Freud's errant train passenger, seems increasingly to be

³⁹⁴ *Spectres*, pp. 25-26, p. 27.

³⁹⁵ Strictly speaking, *Como en la guerra* was 'born' – or begun – in Barcelona and Mexico, where Valenzuela, like her (anti-) hero, spent some years. However, it was completed in Buenos Aires (David Draper Clark, 'Chronology (Luisa Valenzuela)', *World Literature Today*, special number, 'Focus on Luisa Valenzuela', 69.4 (1995), 673.

³⁹⁶ Freud, *The Origins of Religion*, p. 309.

³⁹⁷ *Nadja*, p. 10.

Constructed contingently and through a sequential forgetting; it must shadow itself [...] through chance, accident and the uncanny encounter. As Margaret Cohen [...] [remarks of *Nadja*, the text] ‘posits [...] identity as a sequence of [a]temporally differentiated moments. The *I* becomes a series of ghosts of its contiguous experience rather than a centred self.’³⁹⁸

AZ, in fancy, stays a rationalist – the ultimate rationalist, an analogue of all those Argentineans who would turn a blind eye to violence, to the kidnappings that came to empty colleges and union halls. ‘*Por algo será*’ (“‘There must be a reason’”), they said,’ ‘*Por algo será*’.³⁹⁹ In the absence of such a reason – in the absence of the ‘details’, the ‘information’ that Valenzuela in her novel so deliberately withholds – disarray must mount; agency, she implies, erode. Under *Como en la guerra*’s ‘rule’, at least, the subject shows himself a prey to circumstances, not their master, and the psyche subsists, if it does subsist, as ‘[un] fluir, [...] [una] arbitraria cadena de causas y de efectos’ (p. 106, XXXVII).

At the end of the text, AZ rushes through the Argentinean capital, dazed and frantic, towards the mausoleum where the body of the erstwhile hooker lies. ‘Apúrese’, urge queuing onlookers. ‘Usted tiene que llegar antes que nosotros para romper las apariencias’ (pp. 184-185, XXXVIII). *En route*, he stumbles across a group of guerrillas, who gift him guns, cartridge belts, a helmet, then arm him with explosives. Once he reaches the outer walls, he places the charges and lets the concrete crumble. Behind it stands a glass coffin: the object of his quest, the reliquary that sets the seal on sainthood, the catafalque of an Evita, a Snow White, a *Blancanieves*. Even this spectacular ‘arrival’, however, might be better named egression. *Como en la guerra* whites out the *reaparecida* much as *Le Blanc de l’Algérie* would do, irradiating the field of vision, averting living eyes from any contemplation of the dying/dead. What the bomber ‘sees’ when he looks up, in fact, is simply light – ‘luz sorda’, ‘luz [...] intensísima’, ‘como un diamante’ (p. 195, XXXIX). The moment of illumination, here, is a moment of amaurosis; and the blast that rips across the woman’s tomb will breach the bounds of consciousness, as well.

THE WITCH WAKES UP

³⁹⁸ Roger Luckhurst, “‘Something Tremendous, Something Elemental’: On the Ghostly Origins of Psychoanalysis”, in Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, eds., *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 50-71 (p. 51). (Cohen quote taken from *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 64.)

³⁹⁹ Feitlowitz, p. 98.

Five years after the publication of her 1970s work, Valenzuela would revisit the troubled territory of anguish and forgetting in a second treatise on torture, the short story, 'Cambio de armas'.⁴⁰⁰ 'Cambio', indeed, takes up the theme of 'crystal' in-clarity almost where AZ had had to leave it off: the theme of warped minds, warped memories which 'encase' (wo)men 'in the glass coffins of false past and false future', consigning actuality to an unidentified 'alternative dimension'. It also effects some close-drawn illustration of the Stockholm Syndrome; tells us, to use Mary Daly's mythic 'postscript', of 'the necrophiliac Prince Charming [who] *keep[s]* [his] Snow White spouse in the State of Sleeping Death with promises of a fear-free [life]', who 'pushes' her poison over and over again.⁴⁰¹ The protagonist is an amnesiac, held in a rose-painted prison by 'Roque', the man whose photograph she sees upon her bedside table, whose face smiles, there, with hers, in wedding pose. 'Laura, que todos los días sean para nosotros dos iguales a este feliz día de nuestra unión' (p. 119, XL). Every so often, Roque visits, feeds her tablets, and makes 'love' to her under a mass of mirrors. Outside, two shadowy figures stand on guard; once, his colleagues pass, asking solicitously, '¿Se siente bien ahora? Su esposo nos contó que había tenido problemas con la espalda,' '¿Usted es tucumana, no?' (p. 128, XLI).⁴⁰²

Their queries provoke no reaction. Laura, the story will intimate, has 'shut down' like the veterans and victims who have peopled van der Kolk's wards, 'shut down [...] on a behavioural level, by avoiding stimuli reminiscent of [...] trauma; on a psychobiological level, by emotional numbing, which extends to both trauma-related and everyday

⁴⁰⁰ In *Cambio de armas* (Hanover, N. H.: Ediciones del Norte, 1982), pp. 113-146. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁴⁰¹ *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1978; repr. London: The Women's Press, 1991), p. 352, p. 351 (my italics). The Stockholm Syndrome refers to a tendency, manifest in certain, long-term, captives, to identify with and even idolize their aggressors. The phenomenon take its name 'from an incident involving some young women who were held hostages in a [Swedish] bank [and afterwards] defended the criminals, perceiv[ing] [them] as protectors' (Melamed, Melamed and Bouhoutsos, p. 18). It became notorious, in Argentina, when rumours surfaced that Admiral Chamorro had made a mistress of the *Montonero* Marta Bazan, whilst another ex-terrorist had married her torturer and emigrated with him to Mexico City (Simpson and Bennett, p. 397).

⁴⁰² Tucumán was the province that saw the most intense guerrilla activity, as well as the most intense repression, in the years immediately prior to the 'Dirty War' coup. 'According to [...] one former military officer, [...] whole villages – men, women, and children – in remote mountain areas were tortured [there] by [...] special squads' (Anderson, p. 135).

experience’.⁴⁰³ Her very name strikes her as alien, a term without association, without import (‘le han dicho que se llama Laura pero eso [...] forma parte de la nebulosa en la que transcurre su vida’ (p. 113, XLII)). Words for objects too lack any integrative function; ‘non-sequitur’, in this world, appears the norm. ‘No le asombra [...] el hecho de estar sin memoria’. ‘Lo que sí la tiene bastante preocupada es [...] [la] capacidad suya para aplicarle el nombre a cada cosa y recibir una taza de té cuando dice quiero [...] una taza de té’ (ibid, XLIII). Such ‘preoccupation’, it emerges, is rare. In the main, she cares only for her rubber plant, spends minutes staring from the window at a high and whitewashed wall. And even these pursuits are episodic, ‘ghosted’ into the text via a series of haphazard ‘sequels’ rather than conveyed through correlation, consecution. ‘Cambio’'s structure is fragmentary, not numeric: ‘*Los nombres*’ fade before ‘*La planta*’, ‘*Los espejos*’, ‘*La ventana*’ (XLIV).

‘I am not aware,’ states Freud, ‘that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with *not* thinking of it.’ His remark finds some resonance in Valenzuela’s study, in a ‘case’ where the past ‘figures’ simply as a space disowned, and personal history, as a narrative to be evaded. When Roque finally proposes that Laura hear the details of the ‘accident’ which brought her to the brink of catatonia, her reply is adamant. ‘No quiero saber nada, dejame. [...] No quiero.’ (p. 142, XLV). In a sense those details do, in truth, stay outside ‘knowledge’ – or at least, ‘[hors de] ce qu’on croit savoir sous le nom de savoir.’ But clues persist, as Freud forewarns us. ‘In the war neuroses, [...] observers [...] have been able to explain certain motor symptoms by fixation on the moment at which the trauma occurred.’⁴⁰⁴ Nerves and muscles, to gloss, maintain impressions that the conscious mind has lost or banished; reproduce them ‘as [...] action[s] [...] [until] in the end we understand that this is [a] way of remembering’.⁴⁰⁵ Laura may no longer ‘know’ of horses, yet the sight of Roque’s hide whip leaves her distraught. ‘Se pone a gritar desesperada, a aullar como si fueran a distriparla o a violarla con ese mismo cabo del talero, [...] más [...] vale dejar el rebenque para otro momento’ (p. 131, XLVI). She may no longer ‘know’ of plastic surgeons, yet she palpates her nose,

⁴⁰³ ‘The Body Keeps the Score: Memory and the Evolving Psychobiology of Post-Traumatic Stress’, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 1 (1994), 253-265 (p. 254).

⁴⁰⁴ *On Metapsychology*, p. 282.

⁴⁰⁵ Freud, ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through’, p. 150.

obsessively, ‘sin reconocerla [...] como si acabara de crecer sobre la boca’ (p. 119, XLVII).

The body, here, displays an autonomic attachment to certain sites and stimuli that will be in ‘Cambio’ ‘unsymbolized’ in other fashions. As Marta Morello-Frosch summarizes,

[La] amnesia acentúa [la] dependencia de [Laura], sus carencias relacionales, y su falta de autoconocimiento. [...] Los menguados restos de subjetividad que le quedan residen en su cuerpo [...] el cuerpo deviene *locus* de saberes que la conciencia ha obturada. Allí permanecen los vestigios de una incompleta identidad, de la diferencia (XLVIII).⁴⁰⁶

It is a motor response, not intellectual acumen, which leads Laura to avenge the crimes of degradation, avenge the rape, the broken nose.⁴⁰⁷ ‘Fui yo’, Roque informs her. ‘Yo solo, ni los dejé que te tocaran, yo solo, ahí con vos, lastimándote [...] para quebrarte como se quiebra un caballo [...] tenías órdenes de matarme [...] [pero] te iba a obligar [...] a quererme’ (p. 144, XLIX). His revelation has little effect on the woman, who traces patterns on the paintwork, absently, throughout this speech; and implores that he remain when she sees him heading, later, to unlock the outer door. What turns stupor to arousal is the feel of a revolver, the sleek, black filling of the case he throws in contempt at his once would-be assassin – her case. The *somatic* situation stirs up something to which language and cognition had no access: the trigger is the trigger for a mechanism that doctors of the past would name *restitutio ad integrum*. ‘One element of a traumatic experience is evoked, [and] [...] the other[s] follow automatically.’⁴⁰⁸ One prop is present, and the scene is set for re-enactment. ‘Ella ve [la] espalda que se aleja y [...] empieza a entender [...] la función de este instrumento negro. [...] Entonces lo levanta y apunta’ (pp. 145-146, L).

‘Cambio de armas’, it seems, is a fable of torpidity in which Daly’s doped up *Blancanieves* – the ‘cherished’ princess, ‘la Bella Durmiente’ – ‘va sufriendo mutaciones y [...] se convierte en sapo para trastocar la irrealidad en la que viv[e]’ (LI).⁴⁰⁹ With a touch

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Relecturas del cuerpo en *Cambio de armas* de Luisa Valenzuela’, in Díaz and Lagos, pp. 113-130 (pp. 121-122).

⁴⁰⁷ In 1993, Valenzuela published a second short story to compliment this tale of ‘unwitting’ action, ‘Simetrías’, in which, it is implied, the tortured female protagonist remains conscious of her ordeals, but unable to respond and, eventually, dies. (In *Simetrías* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1993) pp. 173-187.)

⁴⁰⁸ Van der Kolk and van der Hart, p.163.

⁴⁰⁹ Valenzuela, ‘Mis brujas favoritas’, p. 95.

of the wand, the weapon, Laura loses the form whose contours her 'glass coffin' was designed to fit; returns to (the) base; becomes, as Valenzuela has it, 'toad'. The choice of trope is apposite. What better creature to epitomize those traits of writing which the Argentinean claims for women's own, '[their] *fascination with the disgusting*', 'with mud and [...] love of warm viscosities'?⁴¹⁰ What better creature to encapsulate the switch, in 'Cambio', from a plane of abstract unrealities to the realm, the ground, of concrete horrors? The 'moral' of the story, so to speak, is that 'knowledge' – of a sort – 'can arise from repugnance', from involuntary reaction, 'aquellos impulsos que minan al raciocinio [...] y lo tuercen y lo contaminan', 'que nos impulsa[n] a movernos, a bailar y respirar' (LII).⁴¹¹ Laura recoils from contact with the gun case 'como si hubiera tocado la viscosa piel de un escuerzo' (p. 142, LIII), but the much abhorred sensation is the one that will impel her to assert herself as 'other': other to charade, other to docility, other, most of all, to *him*.

In the 1950s, observes Arthur Miller of his famous play, the United States found itself 'delivered into the hands of [...] a ministry of free-floating apprehension. [...] So I suppose that [...] *The Crucible* was an attempt to make life real again, [to make it] palpable'. An attempt, in other words, to re-animate the bodies of the men, the women, brought low by force of 'spectral evidence'; bodies, in Salem, which would be 'denied Christian burial', which would not be uncovered for three hundred years.⁴¹² The same could be said of Luisa Valenzuela's fictions on the trials of Argentina, its paranoid 'Process of Re-organization', its 30,000 'disappeared'.⁴¹³ And like the figures who 'fleshed' out the profile of *La Bataille d'Alger*, like the outlines chalked on Buenos Aires homes, her monochromatics – abstracted bodies, contracted bodies, bodies in two dimensions – spook. 'Il n'y a jamais de devenir-spectre de l'esprit sans au moins une apparence de chair', Derrida reminds us, '[sans] l'incarnation seconde, [...] l'incorporation dans un corps qui n'est [...] ni perceptible ni invisible'.⁴¹⁴ The ghost depends, for its existence, on some semblance of the flesh, the (textual) apparition on some, passing, human 'template': a body sketched *and* pulled away.

⁴¹⁰ 'The Other Face of the Phallus', pp. 243-244.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, p. 246; Díaz, 'Entrevista', p. 29.

⁴¹² *The Crucible in History*, p. 9, p. 51. Miller is, here, referring to *The Crucible* as an act of writing, rather than a staged performance.

⁴¹³ This is also true, in a different way, of the films I discuss in the next chapter.

⁴¹⁴ *Spectres*, p. 202, p. 203.

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LA HISTORIA OFICIAL: WHERE THE CAMERA TIPS THE CRADLE

Le fantôme est une formation de l'inconscient qui a pour particularité de n'avoir jamais été consciente – et pour cause –, et de résulter du passage – dont le mode reste à déterminer – de l'inconscient d'un parent à l'inconscient d'un enfant. Le fantôme a manifestement une fonction différente de celle du refoulé dynamique. Son retour périodique [...] fonctionne comme un ventriloque, comme un étranger par rapport à la topique propre au sujet.

Nicolas Abraham, 'Notules sur le fantôme'

In Luisa Valenzuela's 1990 novel *Realidad nacional desde la cama*, a woman returns to Argentina, after many years in exile, and promptly retreats to bed, to dream and day-dream of the events she missed, the coups, the beatings, the squalor. This oneiric tale, in certain ways, is a re-take on the parable of slumbering Aurora, the Beauty who waited decades to awaken from unnatural sleep; the Beauty, in 'Cambio de armas', who broke the spell without the prince's kiss, who broke the prince along with it. And like 'Cambio de armas', like *Como en la guerra*, *Realidad nacional* is peppered with indicia of 'dissociative' torment, peopled by schizoid, splintered, selves, by doctors-cum-cabbies, soldiers-cum-thieves. Even the bed-bound *señora* – the sole character to keep her 'part' throughout – makes frequent reference to forgetting. 'Alguien le dijo a ella hace poco, [...] que más vale no pensar ni recordar. Como una amenaza, casi, se lo dijo, y ya ni se acuerda quién fue. Se ve que es fácil de aprender, eso de olvidar.' (I).⁴¹⁵ Here, though, the trope of suppression masks a slippage between history and (non-) memory, between the reported and the lived: for the woman was genuinely 'not there' under the junta, must learn

⁴¹⁵ *Realidad nacional desde la cama* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1990), p. 49.

something of the horror she must, at second-hand, forget, must master the facts before she can ‘wipe’ them.

The mirror that *Realidad* holds to Argentina, in other words, reflects an irreality ‘unanchored’ in traumatic or ‘dynamic’ modes of nescience, a delirium without cause in the life-experience of the central, semi-conscious, subject. The figures that trespass, repeatedly, across the woman’s space – a barking sergeant, a stripped and writhing youth – may horrify almost as much as the apparition of the whip had done, in Laura’s amnesiac world, but they lack the weapon’s strange familiarity, its nerve-tingling effect. These representatives of the past appear instead, to echo Abraham, as ‘strangers’ to the mental and somatic ‘topography’ of the dreamer; they prompt resistance from her memory, and yet they never jog it. When Valenzuela’s heroine plunges, headfirst, beneath pillows, the visitations she seeks to shut out are the images of eternally alien crimes and mishaps. When she peers above the sheets, the revenants that she encounters are the ‘ogres’ of her compatriots’ worst nightmares, the ‘denizens’ of their flashbacks, not the inhabitants, until now, of her own. When those revenants begin to speak, the voices of one group, one generation, sound, for us, ‘in the unconscious of another’. And the entry of the phantom, in this text, points up the ‘interpersonal and transgenerational’ impact of brutality, the legacy that nation-wide abuse leaves to the *Proceso*’s children, to its heirs.⁴¹⁶

It is that ‘legacy’ which constitutes the subject of the present chapter; that legacy whose traces I shall follow through the cinema of the post-dictatorship period, through the tableaux offered up in homage and in testament to the victims of the ‘purge’. The most ‘haunting’ filmic narrative to emerge in the years since democratic rule resumed is, indubitably, Fernando Solanas’s 1988 work *Sur*, the story of a homecoming from the misery of gaol. Floreal, the erstwhile prisoner, returns to the suburb where he lived to find it ‘lleno de ausencias’ (II), a bleak deserted quarter strewn with litter, swept by gales.⁴¹⁷ Later, he is greeted by a dead unionist, Ademar Martínez, ‘who has “reappeared” so that he and the other “disappeared” of Argentina’s dirty war might not be forgotten’, ‘reappeared’ to escort Floreal ‘throughout his long night of return, helping him to come

⁴¹⁶ Nicholas Rand, ‘Secrets and Posterity: The Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom’, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Rand, 2 vols (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994-), I (1994) pp. 165-169 (p. 166, p. 168).

⁴¹⁷ *Sur*. Dir. Fernando Solanas. Cinesur. 1988.

to terms with the changes around him'.⁴¹⁸ Before Floreal can, eventually, be reunited with his wife and child, he has to undertake a tour of the neighbourhood which is also the tour of intervening years, an exercise in 'sight-seeing' of the most uncanny kind. We watch Ademar re-enact his own demise, at the hands of an official, then many spectres crowd the square, as the shadowy 'El Gordo' sings of lingering in spirit, chants of absence, hymns *sur-vie*.

Mi barrio era así, así, así ...
 Es decir, qué sé yo si era así ...
 Alguien dijo una vez
 que yo me fui de mi barrio.
 ¿Cuándo, pero cuándo?
 Si siempre estoy llegando.
 Si una vez me olvidé,
 las estrellas de la esquina
 de la casa de mi vieja,
 titilando como si fueran
 manos amigas, me dijeron,
 'Gordo, Gordo, quedate aquí' (III).

For all *Sur*'s pertinence, however, I have chosen to focus, here, upon films in which the 'doubles' that traverse the screen seem less obviously 'disincarnate' than Solanas's misty figures, and the characters who suffer are less patently 'deceased'. Even prior to the sentencing at Salem, notes historian Éva Pócs, occult 'terminology [...] differentiate[d] [between] the spiritual body that became visible in apparitions [after death] [and] the physical double'. Even prior to the judicial admission of 'Spectral Evidence' *per se*, the night visitor or 'alter ego' could be 'imagined' to be material, the 'projection' prove and be 'proved' to be palpably active. 'It was not a soul but a second body; and whilst it was of a spiritual nature, it also had a physical reality.'⁴¹⁹ For most inquisitors, indeed, the female witch (at least) split, often, into more than 'two' dark parts by reproducing in the normal manner, raising infants who might lead a separate, worldly, existence, but would share her extramundane taint. 'El delirio de destrucción', to paraphrase Massera, pursued

⁴¹⁸ Geoffrey Kantaris, 'The Last Snapshots of Modernity: Argentine Cinema after the Process', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 73.2 (1996), 219-244 (p. ?).

⁴¹⁹ *Between the Living and the Dead: A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age*, trans. Szilvia Rédey and Michael Webb (Budapest: Central European Press, 1999), p. 38.

its ravages within the psyche of the scion; and the secrets ‘of the grave’ passed from one depraved being to the recesses of younger, fertile, minds. In *Un muro de silencio*, in *Últimas imágenes del naufragio*, in *Buenos Aires vice versa*, and in *La historia oficial*, too, the second generation becomes the focus of (meta)physical inquiry. It is the *offspring* of the ‘disappeared’ – and not the Floreals, the adult victims – who open cinematic ‘portals’, in these works, to the other-world, the dead.

On one level, then, each of the movies named above explores a facet of human recall that Marianne Hirsch, writing on the Holocaust, dubs and defines as ‘postmemory’. The term, she explains, refers to ‘the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth’ (or, in the Argentine context, predated their ability to register, to store ‘war’). It encapsulates the uneasy actuality of those ‘whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated’.⁴²⁰ Yet only *Buenos Aires vice versa* and *Últimas imágenes* tell their anecdotes from the perspective of juvenescence; and of those two, only the former makes its principal protagonists, explicitly, the orphans of the ‘disappeared’. Where *Un muro de silencio* and *La historia oficial* are concerned, by contrast, ‘postmemory’ is the province of the parent and the foster parent, as well as of the child, and the meaning of the ‘family’ comes under threat from bygone tragedy along with the sense of self. *Un muro* depicts a mother – still in ‘denial’ over the ’70s – confronted by a curious daughter: a teenager who wants to know what happened to her missing father, what happened to his missing friends. *La historia*, set six years earlier, in 1984, tracks a high school teacher’s search for her adopted infant’s origins, for ‘truth’ at the expense of security, for history at the expense of home.

The crucial theme in both films, I shall argue, is justice: justice, to quote Jacques Derrida, as a credo of probity towards the past and pasts-to-come, ‘[un] rapport de fidélité ou de promesse, en quelque sorte, à ce qui n’est plus vivant ou n’est pas encore vivant’. The crucial issue for both Lita Stantic and Luis Puenzo, the directors, is that of respect for the ‘revenant’, consideration for the not-living, the possibly-not-living, the not-yet-living, the not-yet-*fully*-living, ‘ce qui n’est pas simplement présent’.⁴²¹ And the crucial question for both fictional women is how to shield their charges from the last, lingering, effects of Argentina’s witch-hunt, without negating the child’s ‘birthright’,

⁴²⁰ *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22.

⁴²¹ Derrida and Stiegler, p. 139.

without exorcizing the ‘spirit’ of the martyred forebear, the inheritance of strife and pain. In every case, the acknowledgement of that inheritance itself is simply a first step, a first remittance of social, of collective debts; and though *Un muro* and *La historia* do offer us some individual resolution, the filmic exploration of responsibility leads the viewer, ultimately, to a ‘hanging’ ending – the same ending, in fact, that deprives *Realidad*’s reader of all feel of final closure. Valenzuela’s heroine wakes up, gets up, to reclaim the ‘country club’ where she slept for the use of local people, to do something within the conscious world. But when her lover rejoices at their private victory, (‘¡El club ya es nuestro!’ (IV)), she turns to him and concludes, quite simply, with the query, ‘¿Y el país?’ (V).⁴²²

OBLIVION AND ITS ANTONYMS

One of the more recent movies to address the aftermath of the P. R N., Lita Stantic’s *Un muro de silencio* begins with a blurred travelling shot of lovers cycling on a country path, their baby balanced on the handlebars. At each turn of the wheel, the music stops, the screen blackens and a title credit rolls, before we are returned once again to summery views, of smiling faces, of sunlight bouncing from spokes, from pebbles. When the credits are over, the scene changes. The landscape now is bleak and urban, the couple who cross it, elderly, dwarfed by the weight of crumbling concrete. As the camera pans across deserted buildings, one caption – ‘Buenos Aires, 1990’ – gives a clue to our location: E.S.M.A., the Navy Mechanics School that became the most notorious of all the ‘Dirty War’ gaols (figure 12). ‘¿La gente sabía lo que estaba pasando por aquí?’ (VI) asks the woman. ‘Los que no sabían, lo sospechaban’ (VII) answers her companion; and whilst they walk round, a third voice, a tinny, ‘taped’ voice inquires, ‘Don’t you think it’s very difficult for a foreigner to really understand what happened?’ The reply comes from a cassette recording of the female speaker. ‘Argentina has a very specific history. But there have been a lot of concentration camps in Europe’. And then, in an ‘off-the-record’ aside to a second man, seated at her elbow in a tiny office, ‘What I’d like you to emphasize, please ... we’re making this film ... it’s important so that the horror won’t be repeated’.⁴²³

⁴²² *Realidad nacional*, p. 106.

⁴²³ *Un muro de silencio*. Dir. Lita Stantic. Aleph Producciones. 1993.

In the space of five minutes, it appears, *Un muro* has evoked the same conceits which lent *Hiroshima mon amour* such long-drawn impact: the film-within-a-film, the European treatise on ‘plus jamais ça’; the ‘love’ story that intercuts and shapes the telling of a trauma. This love story, however, is not the (English) film-maker’s own tale, but the past cum present of her widowed, cinematic, subject. ‘Kate Benson’ shoots the drama of a marriage torn apart by politics and ended by the brutal machinations of the ‘Process’ – the 70s-set picture that flickers through the credit sequence. Around it, Lita Stantic charts the course of mid-life passion, of a romance which scandalizes, like Alain Resnais’s, by showing up the pleasures of forgetting; of a romance which conflicts, like Alain Resnais’s, with the longing for recall, for ‘une inconsolable mémoire, une mémoire d’ombres et de pierre’. ‘Tu n’étais pas tout à fait mort’, exclaims the Frenchman’s nameless actress. ‘Je t’ai trompé [...] Regarde comme je t’oublie ... – Regarde comme je t’ai oublié.’ The words could almost find a place amongst the speeches of Silvia Cassini, ‘unfaithful’, in her way, to the not quite dead, the *desaparecido*; ‘wedded’, in her way, to the very man she claims to neglect. Silvia’s amorous encounter, point out Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder, is also the ‘forced re-encounter [...] [with] personal wounds, [...] on [*sic*] the background of general normalization’.⁴²⁴

Throughout *Un muro de silencio*, indeed, individual loss comes to upstage as well as represent collective feeling, as though in emulation of an imbalance pursued by Duras years before:

Toujours [l’] histoire personnelle [...] l’emportera sur HIROSHIMA. Si cette condition n’était pas tenue, ce film [...] ne serait qu’un film de commande de plus, sans aucun intérêt sauf celui d’un documentaire romancé. Si cette condition est tenue, on aboutira à une espèce de faux documentaire qui sera bien plus probant de la leçon de HIROSHIMA qu’un document de commande.⁴²⁵

The Argentine film, in these terms, will constitute ‘false documentary’ – for documentary ‘proper’, here, is a genre that even Benson’s friends deem *démodé*. ‘There’ll be a [...] public outcry’, says Kate, when she learns of Menem’s pardons for the junta leaders. ‘I’ve seen the people when they demonstrate [...] hundreds, thousands.’ ‘Where have you seen it?’ rejoins her agent. ‘Documentaries’. ‘Documentaries’, he repeats, in mocking style. ‘Factual’ footage, it is intimated, demands or records *engagements*, which the times debar.

⁴²⁴ *The Legacy of Human Rights Violations in the Southern Cone: Argentina, Chile and Uruguay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 185.

⁴²⁵ *Hiroshima mon amour*, p. 12.

‘To be honest’, explains the Argentinean, ‘I have the feeling that people [...] don’t want to be told about these kinds of things’. ‘Everyone has the right to protect themselves from their past’, concurs the Englishwoman, stunned by popular apathy, as much as Silvia’s reluctance to collude with her.

Yet Benson has, in a sense, misjudged the widow. Silvia, one might argue, avoids the film set in order to protect the past; her ‘logic’ is the rationale of the *refusenik*, the Vietnam veteran who once declared, ‘I do not want to take drugs for my nightmares, because I must remain a memorial to my dead friends’.⁴²⁶ It is the logic that leads María, the protagonist of 1988’s *La amiga*, to protest the exhumation of the mass grave where her son might lie. ‘Termina con esta historia’, implores the latter’s husband. ‘Sabes que nuestro hijo no puede ser...’ (VIII). ‘Yo no sé nada [...] nuestro hijo es un ser humano vivo’ (IX), ‘está en mis pasos, [...] está en mis gritos’ (X).⁴²⁷ ‘Todos están muertos’ (XI), the scriptwriter tells Silvia, fleeing from her second marriage. ‘El no’ (XII), she replies. When recovery from trauma is total, an individual no longer finds him- or her- self compelled to endure the reappearance of memories as flashbacks, as hallucinations. ‘Instead’, write van der Kolk and van der Hart, ‘the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in [...] history, [in] [...] autobiography’.⁴²⁸ But by integrating atrocity into broader narratives – by accepting a ‘cure’, as the Vietnam vet would have it, an epitaph inscribed in stone – the victim *de-charges* the advent of horror. The very quality that renders an experience traumatic (the fact that we cannot take it in through any, existing, mental scheme) proves lost in the telling; the writing of personal history is the first step towards misrecollection.

That, perhaps, is why Resnais’s heroine sees reminiscence and not sex to be the sign of her betrayal, why her Japanese lover insists, ‘je me souviendrai de toi comme de l’oubli de l’amour même’. That, perhaps, is why Silvia Cassini gives no help to those who script the pains, the ordeals of the junta years. Her dilemmas, however, have resonance outside the walls of her own, fractured, household; her decisions have relevance to more than simply one film fiction. The sudden onslaught of terror in the 1970s, notes Tulio Halperín Donghi, ‘revealed the presence of a sinister and previously unsuspected dimension in the Argentine collective experience’. Some observers, he adds, were tempted to surmise that such a dimension had been crucial to that experience since its initiation, since the first

⁴²⁶ Quoted in Caruth, *Trauma*, p. vii.

⁴²⁷ *La amiga*. Dir. Jeanine Meerapfel. Jorge Estrada Mora Producciones. 1988.

⁴²⁸ ‘The Intrusive Past’, p. 176.

settlements of the sixteenth century.⁴²⁹ For others, the repression detailed by the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* was an aberration, an ‘unforgivable crime’.

[And] precisely because it had been classified under so satisfying a label, many Argentines felt ready to lay the matter to rest and address more pressing concerns. [...] [They] adopted the perspective of those caught in the middle in condemning the left, the right, and the terrorist state. Such condemnation was not necessarily unfair, but it tended to dismiss the deepest crisis in Argentine history as merely a succession of meaningless episodes in which the country had been victimized by rival gangs of kidnappers and killers coming apparently out of nowhere.⁴³⁰

As a nation, Argentina too would face the quandary that drives Silvia to the verge of breakdown: whether, and how, to ‘move on’ from trauma, whether, and how, to assimilate the particulars of P.R.N. brutality, to ‘relativize’ them *vis-à-vis* a longer past.

Incorporating recent events ‘into the body of [...] history’, as Halperín Donghi remarks, ‘require[d] modifying some of the basic assumptions’ on which the image of the Argentinean ‘self’ had been built, ‘the image relied on instinctively by Argentines in negotiating their daily lives’.⁴³¹ Failing to ‘historicize’ those events, on the other hand, left the potential for ‘repetition compulsion’ unheeded, untreated and, suggests *Un muro*, life-threatening. By the latter half of the film, its traumatized lead has become so prone to flashbacks, to fleeting glimpses of the vanished Jaime, that she almost kills herself, wrecking a car in his pursuit. For all that, however, Stantic’s work seems ambivalent as to the place or non-place which ‘disappearances’ should occupy in diegeses of the *country*’s growth. ‘Mayo de 1969’, proclaims the opening caption to a short screened in honour of Kate Benson’s visit. ‘La guerra del pueblo ha comenzado. Obreros y estudiantes [...] ocuparon la ciudad de Córdoba. Ésta es [una] reacción espontánea [...] contra la opresión, el hambre, la injusticia y la persecución del gobierno militar’ (XIII). Four years later, this teleological story has spluttered out. There are no more shots of police vans, of

⁴²⁹ One such observer, it might be conjectured, was the director María Luisa Bemberg, whose hugely popular work *Camila*, set under the (1840s) rule of Juan Manuel de Rosas, portrays a brand of state terrorism, which clearly prefigures that of the *Proceso*. Significantly, the filming of this movie – with its scenes of intimidation, abduction, and summary execution – began immediately after the fall of the military regime; ‘the opening took place [...] on the exact day on which Raúl Alfonsín [...] took office’. (Fernando Operé, ‘From Silence to Awakening: The Functional Role of Recent Argentine Films’, *Hispania*, 71.4 (1988), 872-874 (p. 873); *Camila*. Dir. María Luisa Bemberg. G.E.A. Cinematográfica. 1984.)

⁴³⁰ ‘Argentina’s Unmastered Past’, *Latin American Research Review*, 23.2 (1988), 3-24 (p. 3, p. 15).

⁴³¹ Halperín Donghi, p. 4.

firing soldiers, of men in chains; the next black and white reel which Kate views will date, in fact, from 1985. 1974-1984 remains a decade without ‘documentation’, without voice-overs, a ‘blank’ depicted only in the re-enactment of a single couple’s split.

1990, by contrast, is a year *Un muro* does, politically, chart through. It was then that Menem’s government made the greatest moves to shake off any ‘attitude’ to history ‘que [sometía] la vida comunitaria al cotidiano, depresivo y frustratorio influjo de [los hechos pasados] y [mantenía] abierta los heridos que causaron’ (XIV).⁴³² ‘The past’, proclaimed the incoming president, ‘has nothing more to teach us’. ‘We must look ahead, with our eyes fixed on the future, [...] we must learn to forget [...] [or] we will be turned into a pillar of salt.’⁴³³ To ‘learn to forget’, events soon demonstrated, was not – in his mind – to include the *Proceso* in the narrative of the evolution of the present, to confront the memory of atrocity with the forces of ‘oblivion’ as *Hiroshima mon amour* had shown them. ‘De même que dans l’amour cette illusion existe, cette illusion de pouvoir ne jamais oublier, de même j’ai eu l’illusion devant Hiroshima que jamais je n’oublierai’, observes Resnais’s protagonist, and in telling her story, the film gradually dispels that ‘illusion’, the chimera ‘[de la] mémoire inconsolable’. Menem chose to create a new illusion – to conjure away ‘Hiroshima’ itself, to efface even the last surviving ‘souvenirs’ of stones and rubble. The newspapers Kate Benson rustles angrily contain the portents of his ill-starred project: the release of Videla, of Massera, of Agosti, the cancellation of the trials for torture. Only E.S.M.A., now, should be condemned, razed in the interests of ‘reconciliation’.⁴³⁴

‘What are you looking for?’ Kate’s agent asks, catching her engrossed, for the second time, in newsroom footage. ‘I’m just trying not to make too many mistakes’. ‘Don’t worry about it. No one will notice. Nothing is sure any more.’ In *fin de siglo* Argentina, it would appear, judgement has indeed been clouded; attention turned aside from truth,

⁴³² Government decree cited in Stella Maris Ageitos ‘La historia de la impunidad – Argentina (1976/1989): desde las actas del Proceso a los indultos de Menem ...’, Ko’aga Roñe’eta 10, (1997), <http://www.derechos.net/koaga/ageitos/>.

⁴³³ Quoted in Feitlowitz, p. xi.

⁴³⁴ Despite Menem’s efforts, the Navy Mechanics School was eventually spared the wrecking ball thanks to the intervention of a federal judge. ‘La demolición de la E.S.M.A.’, ruled Osvaldo Guglielmino in 1998, ‘puede borrar pruebas que permitan establecer cuál fue el destino final de los miles de desaparecidos durante la dictadura militar’ (LIV). (‘E.S.M.A.: la Justicia impide la demolición’, *La Nación*, 24 January 1998, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/98/01/24/p.71.htm>.)

from horror. The Argentines, to reprise Halperín Donghi's phrase, have 'more pressing concerns' than poring over chronicles of 'bygone' cruelty, higher priorities than interrogating iniquities which could be buried in collective graves.⁴³⁵ After all, as the heroine of another (1980s) film points out, if you address the dead, they tend to 'pone[rse] cargosos' (XV). The Buenos Aires she inhabits – the Buenos Aires of *Últimas imágenes del naufragio* – is plagued by apparitions of the recently demised, wraiths who board its buses and promenade along its darker streets (figure 13).⁴³⁶ 'Suben siempre en esa parada, [...] el cementerio,' Estela tells her novelist companion. 'El colectivo se llena de muertos en esta parada' (XVI). '¿Y adónde van?' (XVII) 'Creo que a ninguna parte. [...] Pero si me ven, [...] empiezan a preguntarme por mamá, por los chicos, mis hermanos, si nos acordamos de ellos' (XVIII). Better to shield one's face, one's eyes: better to ignore the claims that 'ghosts' might have to make upon their living kin. 'No lo ponga en la novela' (XIX).⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Halperín Donghi's views on majority opinion have, it should be added, been borne out in numerous surveys. 'In a poll conducted in late 1994', state Roniger and Sznajder, by way of example, 'people were asked about the most striking event in the last twenty years. While 23 per cent considered that the 1976 dictatorship was the most influential event they recalled, [...] only 4 per cent [named] the disappearances and the Dirty War'. (*The Legacy of Human-Rights Violations*, pp. 195-196.) Argentine cinema – a cinema 'dominated by [...] discussion of the military dictatorship in the years immediately following the return to democracy' – came to reflect this 'process of forgetting'. By the time *Un muro de silencio* opened, the subject of the *guerra sucia* had, John King asserts, 'largely disappeared from the screens'. (*Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1990; expanded edn. London: Verso, 2000), p. 265.)

⁴³⁶ *Últimas imágenes del naufragio*. Dir. Eliseo Subiela. Cinequanon. 1989. The mode of transport is, arguably, far from coincidental. During the dictatorship, relates Ricardo Piglia, 'los militares cambiaron el sistema de señales, [y] en lugar de los viejos postes pintados de blanco que indicaban las paradas de colectivos [pusieron] [...] unos carteles que [decían]: *Zona de detención*' (LV). *Bus stops*, then, became an 'ordinary' reminder of an extraordinary threat, '[d]el terror nocturno que invadía todo' (LVI), '[de] los traslados y [d]el asesinato' (LVII). (*Crítica y ficción* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1990), p. 182.)

⁴³⁷ *Últimas imágenes*, in fact, all but follows Estela's counsel, making only one overt reference to a 'restless' past outside this brief scene. (The second reference occurs in the course of a conversation between the novelist and Estela's brother, when the latter recounts, 'Una vez me llevaron preso. [...] Había que ser calladito, educadito, pelo corto a la gomina. [...] Ahora me gusta [ser así]'. (LVIII)) In Subiela's earlier work, *Hombre mirando al sudeste*, visual allusions to the massacres of the 1970s are compressed still further. The initial dialogue between a psychiatrist and his patient is interrupted, there, by two sequences of hooded figures kissing, then bleeding – a Magritte-esque reminder of *capuchos*, of 'blind' pain. Unlike *Últimas imágenes*, however, *Hombre* does invoke the P.R.N. in other ways: the film, as Geoffrey Kantaris remarks, 'sets up [a] narrative chain [which] equates the asylum with any analogous centre of incarceration and torture, with the Doctor as the unwitting torturer'. (*Hombre mirando al sudeste*. Dir. Eliseo Subiela.

Jacques Derrida, who does, conversely, ‘include’ the *revenant* in every story, prefaces *Spectres de Marx* with the comment, ‘Si je m’apprête à parler longuement de fantômes, [...] c’est-à-dire de certains *autres* qui ne sont pas présents, [...] c’est au nom de la *justice*’.⁴³⁸ His observation finds a parallel in Argentinean critiques of the junta’s legacy, in meditations on the task of mourning for its victims. ‘¿Es posible’, writes Yosef Yerushalmi, ‘que el antónimo de “el olvido” no sea “la memoria” sino la *justicia*?’ (XX).⁴³⁹ In these terms, *Últimas imágenes*’s ‘heavy’ question is not whether Estela can recall traumatic details of her forebears’ suffering – whether time and telling have begun to take the edge from once-black days – but whether she will ‘do some justice’ to that suffering, to their pain. ‘Non pas’, in Derrida’s phrase, ‘un *rendre justice* qui se limiterait à sanctionner, à restituer et à *faire droit*, mais [...] la justice comme [...] l’ex-position an-économique à autrui’. ‘La justice’, to clarify, ‘[comme] principe de [...] *responsabilité* [...] devant [...] ceux qui ne sont pas [...] nés ou qui sont déjà morts’: towards those whose pleas exceed the remit of all courtrooms, whose needs defy our conjecture, our calculation, our ‘amends’; towards those whose time is not, or not yet, now.’⁴⁴⁰

‘Lo que llamamos olvido en el sentido colectivo’, explains Yerushalmi, ‘aparece cuando ciertos grupos humanos no logran ... transmitir a la posterioridad lo que aprendieron del pasado’ (XXI).⁴⁴¹ What we could call justice, by the same token, goes hand in hand with the bequest of learning, with monuments to basic truths. The ‘lesson’ of *Hiroshima mon amour* may, as Michael Roth asserts, be this, ‘we are not stones that photograph the things burned into us’.⁴⁴² Yet without the blocks whose charred façades provide Roth with his metaphor – without the pickled skin, the hair in clumps – there would be no debate, no tourists standing by to weep, albeit briefly. The ‘museum’, so to speak, affords the precondition for the conversation between actress and her lover; the concrete *lieu de mémoire* proves the requisite for exploration of more abstract (blind) spots, of notional

Cinequanon. 1986; ‘The Repressed Signifier: The Cinema of Alejandro Agresti and Eliseo Subiela’, in *Identity and Discursive Practices: Spain and Latin America*, ed. Francisco Domínguez (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 157-173 (p. 165).

⁴³⁸ *Spectres*, p. 15.

⁴³⁹ ‘Reflexiones sobre el olvido’, originally published in *Usos del olvido*, ed. Yerushalmi and others (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1989), quoted in Hilda Sabato, ‘Historia reciente y memoria colectiva’, *Punto de vista*, 17.49 (1994), 30-35 (p. 30).

⁴⁴⁰ *Spectres*, p. 48, p. 16.

⁴⁴¹ Sabato, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁴² ‘*Hiroshima mon amour*. You must remember this’, p. 96.

non-lieux. It is the certainty of the event, the proof Hiroshima happened, which enables Resnais's characters to cast some doubt upon perception of that fatal moment, to blur the contours of their mind's eye view. *Un muro de silencio* resorts, for similar reasons, to the exhibition of surviving matter: the early shots of E.S.M.A.'s wreck. Unlike *Hiroshima mon amour*, it ends as well as starts the tour of memory amongst tokens of disaster, takes us back, at length, to contemplate the debris of the torture cell.

‘¿La gente no sabía lo que estaba pasando por aquí?’ (XXII) inquires Silvia's daughter, echoing Kate Benson's words. ‘Todos sabían’ (XXIII), answers her mother; and for John King, this (emphatic) reply encapsulates *Un muro*'s take on ‘disappearance’, on repressed figures and suppressed facts. ‘The film,’ he contends, ‘is uncompromising about the shared complicity and responsibility of Argentine society during the time of dictatorship.’⁴⁴³ Maybe, however, there are more intimate overtones to the parent-child diptych than King's stress on ‘collectivity’ might indicate, more contemporary connotations than his nods to ‘responsibility during the [...] dictatorship’ divulge. Maybe, the visit to the former prison signals some final understanding of the need to tell, on Silvia's part: some final recognition of the need to order, to (re-)place the past – to let *something else* stand as a ‘memorial’ to her ‘dead friends’. *Un muro de silencio*, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub remark of *Shoah*, shows how atrocity can persist, years later, as

A cultural secret, a secret which essentially, we are still keeping from ourselves, through various forms of communal or of personal denial, [...] The film bursts this secret open. Its whole effort is [...] to enact the *liberation of the testimony* from the bondage of the secret [...] [to] accomplish [...] a repossession of the living voice.⁴⁴⁴

What prompts Silvia to break with silence, moreover, is neither the impulse to denunciation nor a yen for catharsis. Her testimony to the ‘hidden shame’ of Argentina is not an intervention in the name of those who predeceased her, not an intercession on behalf of her own, riven, mind. It is an intervention on behalf of those who come after torture, ‘after’ trauma, who must carry the patronymic *desaparecido* through post-junta worlds. ‘Ton nom à toi est Nevers. Ne-vers-en-Fran-ce’, concludes the Japanese man, in the closing reel of Resnais's work. Stantic, too, propels her piece towards one last act of entitlement, of transfer, ‘handing over’ a claim: to a future in which the after effects of ‘Re-organization’, like the fall-out from Hiroshima, will still be felt.

⁴⁴³ *Magical Reels*, p. 266.

⁴⁴⁴ ‘Foreword’ to *Testimony*, p. xix.

‘EN EL PAÍS DE NOMEACUERDO’

In the first chapter of his 1993 text, Derrida takes a pause from ghostly tropes to speak, instead, of bequest and birthright, to question the devises that each generation assumes from the past. Inheritance, he notes, is always an insignia of diffusion, always an imprint of (w)holes splintered through.

Un héritage ne se rassemble jamais, il n’est jamais un avec lui-même. Son unité présumée, s’il en est, ne peut consister qu’en l’injonction de *réaffirmer en choisissant*. Il faut [...] filtrer, cribler, critiquer, il faut trier entre plusieurs des possibles qui habitent la même injonction. Et l’habitent de façon contradictoire autour d’un secret. Si la lisibilité d’un legs était donnée, naturelle, transparente, univoque, si elle n’appelait et ne défiait en même temps l’interprétation, on n’aurait jamais à en hériter. On en serait affecté comme d’une cause – naturelle ou génétique. On hérite toujours d’un secret – qui dit ‘lis-moi, en seras-tu jamais capable?’⁴⁴⁵

The figure of *héritage* here – *du legs secret*, ‘an’ opacity passed on – seems comparable to that of the spectre itself in the discourse of Nicolas Abraham; for phantoms, for the latter, objectify the gaps ‘qu’a créée[s] en nous l’occultation d’une partie de la vie d’un objet aimé. [...] Ce ne sont pas les trépassés qui viennent hanter, mais les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres,’ *des ancêtres*.⁴⁴⁶ Yet Abraham imposes integrity on his ‘patrimones’ the better to dismiss them, enshrouding each secret within the conjurable (if cloudy) outline of a single shadow, unravelling the enigma of *Hamlet* via the discrete utterances of the deceased king. Derrida’s ‘legacy’, on the other hand, acquires the same multifarious dimensions as the ‘spirit’ of *Spectres de Marx*’s exordium: ‘le *plus d’un*’, or, as the English translation glosses, ‘that which is more than one/no more one’.⁴⁴⁷ It is not a given, but a spectrum – of possibilities, of possible choices, possible gains. Even the injunction *to choose*, he explains, ‘[de] décide[r] dans ce dont tu hérites’, ‘ne peut être une qu’en se divisant, déchirant, différant elle-même, en parlant à la fois plusieurs fois – et de plusieurs voix’.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ *Spectres*, p. 40.

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Notules sur le fantôme’, in Abraham and Torok, pp. 426-433 (p. 427).

⁴⁴⁷ *Spectres*, p. 18; *Specters of Marx*, p. xx.

⁴⁴⁸ *Spectres*, p. 40.

Within *Spectres de Marx*, competing quotes from different works and writers dispute the influence of Marx, of Marxism, as Derrida evokes the turbulent after-life of the ordinances the German willed his heirs. And there is an Argentine film that erects a similarly ‘ramshackle’ framework on the shifting ground of fascism’s estate; that lets myriad post-*Proceso* voices make myriad post-*Proceso* claims. In *Buenos Aires vice versa*, the ‘shipwrecked’ society of Subiela’s *Últimas imágenes* takes centre-stage again seven years on, when awkward questions are no longer the prerogative of the wraith alone – when the children of the ‘disappeared’ are, as Alejandro Agresti’s dedication states, ‘en edad para pedir respuesta a la sociedad’ (XXIV).⁴⁴⁹ *Adolescence*, for this 1996 piece, occupies an ‘unstable’ signifying position: a referential ‘in-between’ recalling that which Agamben attributes both to infants and to spectres. ‘Just as death does not immediately produce ancestors, but ghosts’, he opines, ‘so birth does not immediately produce men and women, [...] if the ghost is the [...] half-dead person, the [child] is [...] a half-alive person’.⁴⁵⁰ The teenagers who roam the ‘back-to-front’ town of the title are, likewise, still negotiating their place in hierarchies that partially exclude them, their status vis-à-vis ‘ancestral’ grades. ‘Somos todos ventrílocuos de nuestros viejos’ (XXV), suggests one boy. ‘Que el mate me dé amnesia, [...] [la capacidad para] olvidar todo esto’, counters another, ‘olvidar el recuerdo, desecharlo’ (XXVI).

The rhetoric of possession, ‘ventriloquism’ bequeathed, extends, in *Buenos Aires*, to the members of an older generation. Witchcraft, with its concomitant shadows and familiars, is passed on, traditionally, in chromosomes, in blood; it is, for the inquisitor, an occult genotype, a strain which can be extirpated by putting progeny to death alongside, or after, parents. The ‘witch-hunters’ of the 1970s, implies this film, will go scouting for offshoots of depravity, for young double(rs), subsequently, too. ‘Me recuerdas una chica izquierdista ... hace veinte años’, taunts an ex-gaoler, pursuing a blind woman around a hotel room, with slaps and well-placed punches, ‘¿... sos izquierdista también?’ (XXVII).⁴⁵¹ The same man will shoot Bocha, a pre-pubescent homeless child who shoplifts in his presence, leaving the child’s friend, a *desaparecida*’s daughter, to sob

⁴⁴⁹ *Buenos Aires vice versa*. Dir. Alejandro Agresti. Agresti Harding Films. 1996.

⁴⁵⁰ *Infancy and History*, p. 83.

⁴⁵¹ A similar play on ‘re-incarnation’ occurs in Agresti’s earlier, and better-known, film, *Boda secreta*. There, an amnesiac torture victim recovers his memory and returns to his fiancée’s village, unrecognized, to reclaim her after twenty years, only to find himself hounded out once again by the very groups of people who had fingered him as a ‘subversive’ during the ‘Dirty War’. (*Boda secreta*. Dir. Alejandro Agresti. Allarts-Cogurccio-Cinéphile. 1989.)

without comprehension, ‘Bocha, [...] mi mamá, mamá’ (XXVIII).⁴⁵² She is but one of several orphans who end the picture puzzling. The residuum of Salem, states Miller’s epilogue to *The Crucible*, was a morass of rights and wrongs. ‘Twenty years after the last execution, the government awarded compensation, [...] some beneficiaries were [...] not victims at all, but informers.’⁴⁵³ The legacy of Argentina’s massacres, insinuates Agresti, has been similarly mis-administered. As reporters come on screen, exonerating the murderer, *Buenos Aires vice versa* leaves its spectator, like its protagonists, to wonder where – and when – the ‘moral’ lies.

The work on which I shall concentrate for the remainder of the chapter tends, by contrast, to be viewed as unambiguous in inference, in message. *La historia oficial*, affirms David Foster, ‘deals in a straightforward fashion with the issue of military dictatorship’: it presents ‘a [...] world [...] [divided] into [...] the good and the bad, [...] a Sunday school lesson in sin and grace inscribed in terms of the political process’.⁴⁵⁴ Puenzo’s film, writes Ana López, less acerbically, achieved ‘popular success [...] [only] by recourse to the melodramatic’.⁴⁵⁵ Much of the criticism levelled at this Oscar-winner has been directed at the ‘glossy setting’ that the characters inhabit, ‘the *Vogue* look’ of their homes, their costumes, the charm-enhancing angles deployed by a director whose career (before) was in advertising.⁴⁵⁶ Where *La Bataille d’Alger* uses grainy film stock the better to evoke a realm of spectres, of bodies not-quite-there, *La historia oficial* – according to some – soft-focuses reality to opposite effect, ‘air-brushing’ out all shades, all shadows, distorting atrocity through a Vaseline-smeared lens. ‘La estética publicitaria’, rails Peter Schumann,

⁴⁵² This depiction of the ‘trigger-happy’ shop-guard, it should be pointed out, has historical, as well as metaphorical, significance. ‘Between 1985 and 1989’, state Roniger and Sznajder, ‘more than 400 cases of civilian deaths in police operations were reported for the city of Buenos Aires and the surrounding area.’ Beatings, they go on, ‘seem to have [remained] [...] common in the [...] 1990s’; 870 cases of maltreatment by police and security personnel were reported in 1990 alone. (*The Legacy of Human-Rights Violations*, p. 147.)

⁴⁵³ *The Crucible*, p. 127.

⁴⁵⁴ *Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (London: University of Missouri Press, 1992), p. 42, p. 49.

⁴⁵⁵ ‘Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema’, in *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, ed. John King, Ana M. López, and Manuel Alvarado, (London: British Film Institute, 1993), pp. 147-163 (pp. 148-149).

⁴⁵⁶ Nisa Torrents, ‘Contemporary Argentine Cinema’, in *The Garden of Forking Paths: Argentine Cinema*, ed. John King and Nisa Torrents, (London: British Film Institute, 1988), pp. 93-113 (p.95, p. 108).

‘con sus rebuscados paneos de cámara sobre finos interiores y ropas exquisitas, acaba por deformar la temática del film’ (XXIX).⁴⁵⁷

For other commentators, the theme itself proves something of a stumbling block. *La historia oficial* is the story of a blinkered, middle-class *porteña* (XXX), Alicia Marnet de Ibáñez, and her daughter, Gaby, adopted five years prior to the filmic ‘present’. As the military regime starts to crumble in the wake of the Falklands/Malvinas War, a trickle of exiled dissidents come back to Argentina, including a school-friend of Alicia’s, a woman she has not seen since parenthood. The two meet up and Ana tells her erstwhile playmate of the abuses meted out to women under the *Proceso*, of mothers tortured, of new-born babies abducted and never found. Those babies, she adds, were sold on or given to the government’s supporters; Alicia, then, begins to contemplate the murky origins of her own child, to search out clues to Gaby’s (and her husband’s) past. By highlighting the plight of infant rather than adult victims, the film, Foster stresses, takes on an easy target: Puenzo’s narrative appeals, not to outrage at ideological intolerance, ‘but [...] to the universal abhorrence of the clandestine distribution of innocent babes as booty’. Whatever one’s opinions as to the merits and demerits of national ‘reorganization’, ‘few could object to the clamour raised on behalf of disappeared children’.⁴⁵⁸

La historia, in this reading, is essentially familial drama, an exercise in small-scale tragedy that draws a veil across collective condition(ing)s, the wider repercussions of the *coup d’état*. ‘*The Official Story*’, says the American, ‘closes with Gaby attempting to sing along with María Elena Walsh’s ‘En el país de Nomeacuerdo’ (In the country of I don’t remember), which is, of course, militarized Argentina’.⁴⁵⁹ His implication, it seems, is that the *popular* song ‘of the 1970s is extra-diegetic to the tale of child-theft, that the words of Walsh’s ditty signal a space outside the four walls of the home-cum-screen, an ‘octave’ of society the film, like Gaby, cannot quite reach.

En el país de Nomeacuerdo
doy tres pasitos y me pierdo:
un pasito por allí
no recuerdo si lo dí;

⁴⁵⁷ *Historia del cine latinoamericano*, trans. Oscar Zambrano, Cine Libre, 5 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Legasa, 1987), p. 45.

⁴⁵⁸ *Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, p. 43, p. 42.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 53.

un pasito para allá
¡ay! qué miedo me da ... (XXXI)⁴⁶⁰

What I want to argue here, however, is that Walsh's rhyming couplets are – on the contrary – very much diegetic to the account of disappearance and re-appearance, of children departed and children 'returned'. They do not simply close the work, as Foster signals, but echo from the gramophone in Gaby's debut scene; she prattles them, later, down the telephone, before her last, her solo chorus. More than that, the poem acts, every time, as pointer, as metaphoric 'flag'. It is the standard for a substratum to the Ibáñez's world which Foster, ostensibly, misses: a land where little girls are also ghosts, where moral 'technicolour' blinks, and good and evil fade to grey.

PHENOMENON OR PHANTASM

In an essay on rites of passage, Giorgio Agamben maintains that human maturation divides the species into groups as distinct from one another as the apparition, in folklore, is from the corpse, the disembodied from the cadaver. With respect to their 'signifying function', at least, 'adults and dead', he contends, 'belong to the same order, that of stable signifiers and the continuity between diachrony and synchrony'. Children and phantoms, conversely, 'represent the discontinuity and difference between the two worlds, [...] between the world of the living and the world of the dead, [...] between synchrony and diachrony'.⁴⁶¹ The adult and the (quiet) dead, in other words, may be stacked across a horizontal axis of simultaneity or contemporaneity – the field of populace alive at any given point in time, the domain of all those who have, by that same time, expired. They may, equally, be amassed along a vertical axis, a line cutting through history, for both grownups and remains bear markers of succession in events: the signs of ageing, the trace of rot, decomposition. In either case, they have co-ordinates, a point of 'reference'. But the spectre cannot so easily be plotted on chronometric graphs; '[il] n'appartient plus au temps, si l'on entend sous ce nom l'enchaînement des présents modalisés (présent passé, présent actuel: "maintenant", présent futur)'.⁴⁶² And babies, too, pass through temporal borders, from 'not there then', to 'there right now'.

⁴⁶⁰ *La historia oficial*. Dir. Luis Puenzo. Progress Communications. 1985.

⁴⁶¹ *Infancy and History*, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁶² Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 17.

In English, a single term makes the analogy that Agamben draws at some length: *larva*, ‘a spectre’, according to the dictionary, and ‘an animal in an immature [...] state’, ‘a ghost, hobgoblin’, and a ‘grub’.⁴⁶³ In Argentine Spanish, the word *desaparecido* has had to take on a dual connotation, which is comparable in kind, encompassing those dead who ‘wandered’ mysteriously outside cemeteries, and those living last seen or heard of, by their families, as babies, as toddlers, as foetuses. Where the military did provide a tomb, a coffin for their youngest victims, there was no guarantee of who – indeed what – had been laid to rest; the casket of one missing girl contained only woolly socks and a derisory, plastic, dummy (figure 14). A ‘representation’, to quote Diana Taylor, ‘[had been used as a] substitute [...] for the “real” person, [...] the signifier [...] [had] erase[d] the signified’.⁴⁶⁴ Or rather, the signifier (the sock, the pacifier that ‘said’ baby) had been destabilized, left swinging, referentially, between two contradictory poles: oscillating, as the phantom does, between the signified, existence, and the signified, non-existence. We could assume, on the basis of the coffin’s contents, that Matilde is alive. We could assume that she is dead, so dead that not one bone survives to mark her passing. The ‘phenomenon’ of explicit meaning, as Derrida has it, is here ‘truly’ illusory, truly ‘*phénomène comme phantasme*’, *phénomène comme projection*.⁴⁶⁵

La historia oficial, like *Le Polygone étoilé*, trades off this instability in sense in order to upset the discourse of ‘reasonable’ (counter-) force, to derange a drama of insurgency that had cast Matilde as the casualty of her own actions, interring the semi-empty casket under the epitaph, ‘armed extremist’.⁴⁶⁶ And Puenzo, like Kateb, reiterates the ‘dictates’ of authority – its tropes, its ideograms – in such a way as to expose them for an instant as unintelligible, the ‘Ker! Krrrrr! crrrrrrr!’ of croaking frogs. His heroine, Alicia, has preserved a case of ‘relics’, sorry scraps that bring to mind the tokens discovered at San Isidro, the year before the film’s release. In one telling scene she lays them out across the table, pinning nappy-cloth and tucking folds to make a kind of hieroglyph of infancy, a sister-image to the ‘real-life’ simulacrum set up not far away (figure 15). Her creation, ostensibly, has much the same import. The assemblage of baby-belongings point toward

⁴⁶³ *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, ed. A. M. Macdonald, (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1972), p. 742; *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. William Little, H. W. Fowler, J. Coulson, 3rd edn, rev. C. T. Onions, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), I, p. 1108.

⁴⁶⁴ *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s ‘Dirty War’* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 142.

⁴⁶⁵ *Monolinguisme*, p. 48.

⁴⁶⁶ Taylor, p. 142.

a past, toward a presence, departed now for good. The fabric ‘fits’ round limbs that remain obstinately intangible; whilst Alicia, for her part, sobs as though she were a woman bereaved. The context, nonetheless, serves to garble the symbolism, to scramble the intimation ‘this child is lost’. Where Kateb shifted from *francophonie* to *arabophonie* to muddle the message that ‘confession counts’, Puenzo displaces the signs of victimization into a setting in which they also appear alien. The hands we watch rummage through rags are not ‘subversive’s’ hands, hands which have raised banners to protest at kidnapping, but privileged hands, hands which *have* had a child to cradle, to caress.

The irony – and the ambivalence – of *La historia*’s (re-) enactments are summarily apparent slightly later, when Alicia meets a *madre de la Plaza de Mayo* whose daughter may have given birth to Gaby. ‘Yo no digo que sea ella, pero las fechas coinciden más o menos, ¿no?’ (XXXII) comments Sara, tearfully proffering a picture of a girl whose resemblance to the five-year old is obvious. Overwhelmed, Alicia in turn begins to weep, and the elderly woman interjects, ‘no llore, no llore, llorar no sirve ... yo sé lo que digo, llorar no sirve’ (XXXIII). But what exactly is Alicia crying for? What is her grief, her distress? Certainly, the photographs of Sara’s child and son-in-law elicit the unease of which Barthes spoke, on contemplating old snap-shots: the morbid intuition of catastrophe, of immanent demise. ‘Ces deux petit[s]’, as he put it, ‘ont toute la vie devant [eux]; mais aussi [ils] sont mort[s] (aujourd’hui), [ils] sont donc *déjà* mort[s] (hier)’.⁴⁶⁷ To Foster, Sara’s pictures are the keys, too, to ‘sociohistorical awareness’, the proofs Alicia needs to reach a ‘moral anagnorisis’; proofs that (other) people’s children lived, and played in poses not dissimilar to her daughter’s, that (other) people’s offspring died, and left behind them images not dissimilar to her child’s.⁴⁶⁸ ‘Le nom du noème de la Photographie’, in this analysis, ‘[est] “Ça-a-été”’.⁴⁶⁹

There is, for all that, a case to be made here against either ‘*ça-a-été*’ and/or *ça-va-être* as shorthand for the sudden realization, which drives Alicia to sob. As Sara shows the portraits with the words, ‘no quedó nada, nada. Estas [...] fotos solamente’ (XXXIV), the awful message that her exhibition conveys to the other is not simply ‘so it was for me’, nor yet, ‘so it would be for them’. It is, perhaps primarily, ‘so it could be for you’, *ça-risque-d’être*. ‘As an unstable signifier’, writes Agamben, the child ‘can, at any moment, be transformed into its own opposite’: the ‘half-alive’, one might conjecture, can become the

⁴⁶⁷ *La Chambre claire*, pp. 150-151.

⁴⁶⁸ *Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, p. 47, p. 46.

⁴⁶⁹ Barthes, p. 120.

‘half-dead’, the ephemerally apparent, to reprise Shakespeare’s terminology, vanish to a ‘prison-house’.⁴⁷⁰ In an age of low infant mortality, such metamorphoses might strike us as unlikely; the boundaries between absolute visibility and absolute invisibility are less permeable, for children, than they were in Hamlet’s day. Alicia, however, must countenance precisely the possibility that Gaby will soon be (living-) dead *to her*. All but indistinguishable, in appearance, from Sara’s kin, the little girl comes to haunt our screen ‘[comme] fantôme de fantôme’, flitting around like a celluloid re-animation of those figures which we see fading, enshrined in blurry stills (figure 16).⁴⁷¹ And like the lookalikes who act out *La Bataille d’Alger*, her role is to re-trace the steps that took persecuted people from sight, from mind, tore them from black and white ‘reality’ to a place, a space, where nothing – least of all the future – could be considered sure.

Agamben, at times, gives the term ‘infant’ an antonym more common than the ‘half-dead’ description that I employed above. The binary he constructs instead, in certain contexts, is ‘adult-child’; the transformation of the juvenile signifier ‘into its own opposite’, in those contexts, would consist in the passage to maturity, rather than evanescence.⁴⁷² This motility in coupling, this fluid fabrication and dismantling of antitheses to ‘the child’, finds a parallel in *La historia*, as well. Gaby teeters, figuratively, on a tightrope dividing ‘palpable’ from impalpable, ‘on-the-spot’ from disappeared. She also exists on the brink of adulthood in an environment in which growing up is overtly associated with the break up of the home. Alicia, we learn, is an orphan.

Yo era como Gaby. Estaba sentada en la mecedora de la abuela ... y no entendía por qué tardaban tanto. Se habían muerto los dos juntos en un accidente. La abuela, pobre, me hablaba de un viaje ... inventaba cartas ... Durante años los esperé ahí, sentada en esa mecedora. Creía que papá y mamá me habían abandonado (XXXV).

When Gaby sings a final rendition of ‘En el país’ from that same rocking chair, then, the indications are clear: the land of ‘*she*-doesn’t-remember’ – an anteriority where she might lose her ‘self’ *pasito a pasito* (XXXVI) – is her foster mother’s past, as much as her biological mother’s. Where *Buenos Aires vice versa* marshalled many heirs to dispute Argentina’s legacy, *La historia oficial*, it seems, has more than one testator.

⁴⁷⁰ *Infancy and History*, p. 83.

⁴⁷¹ Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 203.

⁴⁷² *Infancy and History*, p. 83.

INHABITING THE 'GREY' ZONE?

Twenty years after the publication of *Infancy and History*, the Italian philosopher turned his attention, once more, to 'limit situations', localities in which words and things are mutable, and may change unexpectedly into their opposites. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben's vocabulary of referential instability finds a new, less 'occult', outlet than his thesis on the *larva*: the credo of the Nazi concentration camp, where the 'state of exception' became 'normal', and the extreme became everyday.⁴⁷³ Alongside this appraisal of the 1940s' horrors, he addresses the inconstancy of the moral injunctions those horrors have prompted since – precepts, he claims, that are rooted in the law.

Almost all the categories that we use in moral [matters] [...] are in some way contaminated by law: guilt, responsibility, innocence, judgement, pardon ... This makes it difficult to invoke them without particular caution. As jurists well know, law is not directed toward the establishment of justice. Nor is it directed toward the verification of truth. Law is solely directed toward judgement.

Justice, for Agamben, like Derrida, inheres in neither *droit* nor tort. Indeed, the token or symbolic recompense dispensed by the courts can obviate all future possibility of genuine atonement; 'la sentence tient lieu du vrai, du juste, et vaut comme vérité quand même elle est d'une injustice et d'une fausseté patentes'.⁴⁷⁴ Where judge and jury fail most flagrantly, however, is in determining responsibility, establishing *on whom* onuses of expiation lie. Many crimes committed at Auschwitz defied any attempt to 'arbitrate' between protagonists. The 'network of human relationships', wrote Primo Levi, 'could not be reduced to the [...] blocs of victims and persecutors'. 'In the Lager, [...] there exist[ed] grey [...] persons', '[a] band of half-consciences', 'a [...] zone with ill-defined outlines which both separate[d] and join[ed] [...] two camps'.⁴⁷⁵ That 'grey zone' furnishes Agamben with 'something like a new ethical element' in his argument against 'legal-eze', a testament to '*impotencia judicandi*' that subverts judicial truth.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (New York: Zone Books, 2000), p. 49.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁴⁷⁵ *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, (London: Abacus, 1989), p. 23, p. 33, p. 50, p. 27.

⁴⁷⁶ *Remnants*, p. 21; Levi, p. 43.

Levi, in his last work, draws a distinction between those who can and cannot ‘turn their backs’ on torment, which is more or less coterminous with the perimeter of the prison. ‘The majority of Germans’, he avers, might delude ‘themselves that not seeing was a way of not knowing, and that not knowing relieved them of their share of complicity or connivance.’ The inhabitants of the Lager, on the other hand, ‘were denied the screen of willed ignorance [...]: [they] were not able not to see’.⁴⁷⁷ *La historia oficial*, in its way, picks up this story of voluntary nescience at the point of (a much later) liberation: the point at which the doors of Argentina’s gaols swung open, confronting those who had elected to avert their gaze, there, with those who never had the choice. The exposure of atrocity, moreover, prompts a kind of over-spill of ethical dubiety, a swelling of the ‘half-conscience’, half-culpable ‘band’; what breaks down together with the ‘screen of willed ignorance’ is the wall that once bricked Levi’s ‘grey zone’ safely up inside the camps. As it does so, the criteria of judgement loosen their grip and start to blur. Puenzo’s film alludes to ‘facts’ the *Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* would formulate, but it spins a web of imbrication, too, which no magisterial report could hold, encompass.

Alicia, for a history teacher, is shockingly naïve. After an evening with Ana, she asks her friend to explain why she went into exile, and in a few minutes becomes party to a testimony that encapsulates the junta’s more disturbing trends:

Entraron a patadas, me pusieron un pullover en la cabeza, y rompieron todo. Me llevaron en un auto con los pies de ellos encima. [...] Cuando me desperté estaba desnuda arriba de una mesa donde empezaban a picanearme. [...] Perdí un poco la noción del tiempo. [...] Todavía me despierto ahogada a la mañana. Estoy allí colgada, y me meten la cabeza en un tacho de agua [...] Cuando salí de allí, me dijeron que había estado treinta y seis días. [...] Al principio, me libré de las violaciones. ¿Sabés por qué? Porque el que vino a casa, el único al que le miré la cara, me sonrió y me dijo: “A vos te voy a guardar para mí” (XXXVII).

The response this broken account elicits is, in an ironic fashion, as significant as its contents. Hearing Ana’s reference to rape, Alicia embraces her, and a shot of their two faces, the one crying, the other perturbed, fills the screen (figure 17). Then, Alicia begins to interrupt the stream of revelations; the framing alters, and though the close-ups continue, each woman comes to the fore alone. When Alicia inquires, solicitously, ‘¿Hiciste la denuncia?’ (XXXVIII) Ana angers, jibing, ‘¡Qué buena idea! [...] Y vos, ¿a

⁴⁷⁷ *The Drowned*, p. 65.

quién le hubieras hecho la denuncia?’ (XXXIX). When the latter raises the subject of the babies who were kidnapped, the violin music that here (as elsewhere) under-‘scores’ intense emotivity comes to an abrupt halt. Alicia jumps to her feet, startled. The camera zooms out, and whilst Ana, preparing to leave, blurts, ‘Nunca lo había contado. Lo escribí una sola vez, para la Comisión. ¡Increíble! ¡Me siento culpable!’ (XL) her hostess turns tail, physically, upon the lens, turning tail, affectively, upon the guest.

The altercation with Ana is not the sole example we are given of a certain, froward, myopia in Alicia’s approach. Subsequently, she quizzes Benítez, a colleague, about the veracity of the lists printed in the papers, of ‘disappeared’ and dead. ‘¿Será verdad? [...] Habrá gente [...] que cambió de empleo, que está en otro lugar, ¿no?’ (XLI) His reaction, like Ana’s, verges on disgust. ‘¿Y a usted qué le importa lo que puede ser cierto?’ (XLII) he retorts, clambering from her car at the Plaza de Mayo, engulfed by protestors, by placards bearing photographs and dates. ‘Siempre es más fácil creer que no es posible, ¿no? Sobre todo porque para que sea posible, se necesitaría mucha complicidad, mucha gente que no lo podría creer, aunque lo tenga delante’ (XLIII). Yet despite the overt reference to ‘complicity’ in this scene, the fractious *pas de deux* performed by the two women still remains, perhaps, the sharpest evocation of the bonds that conjoin innocence and guilt, entwine insight with incomprehension. As they near each other, then part, make contact, then pull back, Alicia and Ana enact in turns the roles of victim and bystander, judge and judged, responsible and irresponsible, assuming those same moral stances which fuse, for Agamben, in one (il)licit ‘cloud’, one ‘greyness’.

Our immediate sympathies are, incontrovertibly, directed towards Ana. The exercise in ‘truth and reconciliation’ undertaken at Alfonsín’s behest has, it would appear, done little to sensitize public opinion to the severity of the punishments the P. R. N. inflicted on ‘terrorists’ and (prospective) dissidents alike. The statements transcribed by the *Comisión* – the awful affidavits of survivors, of relatives – fall on semi-deaf ears, for all the tears. ‘Les victimes’, observed one Frenchman in 1945, ‘sont toujours gênantes, [...] il leur arrive d’être défigurées. Leurs plaintes sont lassantes pour qui désire retrouver au plus vite la sérénité bienveillante des jours’.⁴⁷⁸ His cynical assessment is borne out by the events that take place in the Marnet de Ibáñez home. Ana ends up feeling stigmatized, blemished by the experience of incarceration: ashamed of being singled out for ‘special’ attention (‘treinta y seis días, [...] todo el tratamiento’ (XLIV)), and of tarrying to speak it now. Alicia, as sheltered and as spoiled, materially, as her daughter, has no desire to

⁴⁷⁸ Emmanuel Mounier, quoted in Rousso, p. 36.

know. And Roberto, her husband, persists in censuring victims for the horrors that befell them. 'Vivía con un subversivo. Lo que no entiendo es como podía volver a entrar y andar suelta' (XLV). The only positive aspect he discerns, in Ana's repatriation, is that at least she no longer looks the leftist 'part', no longer advertises 'suspect' mores, by dressing or demeanour. 'Creo que es la primera vez que te veo con pollera. Te hizo bien Europa. Como si te hubiera allanado los bordes' (XLVI).⁴⁷⁹

The encounter with the raped woman, though, constitutes the first stage in a series of transformations that make of Alicia, initially, 'a *second-degree witness* (witness of witnesses, witness of testimonies)'.⁴⁸⁰ *La historia oficial*, it has been said, 'blame[s] the Argentine people [for the excesses of the junta] more than the Argentine military'.⁴⁸¹ There is a caveat to such criticism, according to Kathleen Newman, to quote, 'if we remember that the film was made before the trials of the generals and the new limits of denunciation were not yet set, the film's indirect or tentative political analysis can be better understood'.⁴⁸² John King mounts another defence: '*The Official Version* allowed the Argentine audience a form of collective catharsis, enabling them to experience, in public, emotions that had remained private during the years of the dictatorship'.⁴⁸³ Amongst these 'emotions', I would suggest, is the complex agitation that comes of watching violence obliquely, of resisting sights of brute oppression, even as they draw the eyes. The 'historian on the screen' proves both, in Felman's words, a 'catalyst – [and] agent of the process of *reception*', a mirror-image of each spectator 'putting pieces together' after the fact, and a spur to that gesture of re-composition, to 'working through' (someone else's?) traumatic acts.

In many ways, this sidelong glance into the torture chamber is as apposite to the *post*-trial realities of Argentina as any 'straight' depiction or condemnation of the generals might have been. By focussing on a middle-class couple, asserts Nisa Torrents, 'Puenzo

⁴⁷⁹ The irony here is that the immaculately-groomed *Alicia* is, likewise, a product of enforced foreign 'refinement', insofar as the actress, Norma Aleandro, had herself 'fled the country in 1976', after winning fame in Jorge Cedrón's pro-Peronist *Operación Masacre*. (Tim Barnard, 'Chronology of Argentine Cinema', in *Argentine Cinema*, ed. Barnard (Toronto: Nightwood Editions, 1986), pp. 145-163 (p. 162).)

⁴⁸⁰ Felman, 'The Return of the Voice', p. 213.

⁴⁸¹ Kathleen Newman, 'Cultural Redemocratization: Argentina 1978-89', in *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, ed. George Yúdice, Jean Franco and Juan Flores, Cultural Politics, 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 161-185 (pp. 173-174).

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ *Magical Reels*, p. 96.

was able to convince large sectors of society that the Proceso was backed by a complex network of interests and collaborations and that the Junta chose both its victims and its torturers from across the social spectrum'.⁴⁸⁴ By staging the dilemmas of a woman who was 'culpable' (by default) and 'impeccant' (by law) of acquiescence in the wave of abuse, *La historia oficial* was able to make its own appeal to *impotencia judicandi*, interpellating a general public that could not, would not, like Alicia, stand trial. The sentences passed (then revoked) in the court rooms of the 1980s furnished some *ersatz* truths about the architecture – and the instigators – of the 'Dirty War', however questionable. The 'sins of omission' committed in civilian circles permitted no such facile substitutions, no final verdicts and, above all, no acquittal. These, to counter Newman's claims, were crimes for which the 'limits of denunciation', the limits of implication, *still* remain to be set, crimes for which the hearings ran on, and on, and run.

DUE DISOBEDIENCE

David Foster, in his otherwise castigatory reading of *La historia*, does perceive an instance of equivocacy, a moment of 'laudable' vacillation, in the scene that precedes Gaby chirping in the rocking chair. After her second rendezvous with Sara, Alicia, sick of Roberto's evasiveness, confronts him with her suspicion that 'their' child's mother was killed. As he searches the apartment for the little girl, his wife calls mockingly, 'Es terrible [...] no saber dónde está tu hija' (XLVII), and he turns on her, collaring her, dragging her to the door-frame, slamming her fingers below the hinge so that she screams with pain (figure 18). When she has wiped away the blood, Alicia hugs Roberto, then walks out, leaving her house-keys, symbolically, hanging on the inside of the lock. 'The meaning of this embrace', writes Foster, 'is not immediately clear, although the spectator could well interpret it as a gesture of commiseration, perhaps in recognition of the suffering that still awaits them'. Later, he re-phrases that remark, expanding upon the first – casual – gloss: 'Alicia's embrace may [...] be viewed as an almost parenthetical gesture toward a recognition of the ambiguities of human motivation and conduct that has up to this point been absent from the film'.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁴ 'Contemporary Argentine Cinema', p. 108.

⁴⁸⁵ *Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, p. 41, p. 46.

There are, notwithstanding, aspects of this sequence that problematize as much as highlight the filmic dramatization of a 'grey zone'. In *Testimony*, Dori Laub lays a case for the transference of extreme anguish, its displacement from *a* to *b*.

The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels.⁴⁸⁶

Felman, similarly, tends to conflate the subject-positions that the actuality, and the report, of violence might imply ('can the saved be separated from the drowned?'), extending the symptomatology of trauma, in a second work, to every narrator, every audience of one sex. ('Every woman's life contains [...] the story of a trauma, [...] any feminine existence is in fact a traumatized existence').⁴⁸⁷ For other critics, such 'unmediated transition[s]' between the status of the bystander and the status of the victim are dangerous at best.⁴⁸⁸ LaCapra voices his objections to the Felman/Laub perspective bluntly. 'The notion of trauma should [not] be rashly generalized [and] [...] the difference between trauma victim and historian and secondary witness – or for that matter between traumatization and victimhood – [should not] be elided'.⁴⁸⁹ And in so doing, he also pinpoints what is troubling about Puenzo's *dénouement*, a sudden change in standing which threatens to dispel ethical fogs.

Alicia, until now, has been elegant and composed; she 'sweeps', in Foster's words, 'through [...] space with all the bearing of a woman [...] in command of her life'.⁴⁹⁰ Roberto's onslaught reduces her to fear, to writhing panic. She chokes out replies to his '¿Dónde está?' (XLVIII) as though she, like Ana, had woken from sleep to find herself drowning. She sobs and gasps to the same minor chords that had accompanied her

⁴⁸⁶ 'Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in Felman and Laub, pp. 57-74 (pp. 57-58).

⁴⁸⁷ 'Camus' *The Fall*, or the Betrayal of Witness', in Felman and Laub, pp. 165-203 (p. 182); *What Does a Woman Want?* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 16.

⁴⁸⁸ LaCapra, *History and Memory*, p. 111. Kali Tal, indeed, condemns the theses formulated in *Testimony* absolutely. 'The survivor's experience', she notes, 'has been completely replaced by the experience of those who come in contact with the survivor's testimony – an appropriative gambit of stunning proportions'. (*Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*, Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture, 95 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 53-54.)

⁴⁸⁹ *Writing History*, p.97.

⁴⁹⁰ *Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, p. 44.

friend's cries. As panes of glass in the door shatter under the weight of the man's blows, a psychological 'screen' too seems to break, to splinter, finally, to shards. That screen, for Alicia, is Levi's blind of wilful ignorance: the blind that stopped her realizing the full implications of her research, her probes into archives and files. For the spectator, arguably, it is the shield that stood between Puenzo's protagonist and the suffering she intermittently engaged and questioned, cleaving *prise de conscience* from martyrdom. Where Alicia's disputes with Ana and Benítez had been stage-managed to allow identification, engender empathy (eventually), 'both ways', the quarrel with Roberto closes out such moral and affective swings. In this scene at least, the roles are set – she is the victim, he the boor. 'The symptom[s] of trauma' have not, here, been alleviated by the film's focus on listening, as well as telling, on inquiry as well as agony; they have 'simply [been] [...] passed on'.⁴⁹¹

Yet if *La historia* does, ultimately, suspend non-judgement of its own characters, it still touches on an issue that would, in 1990s' Argentina, prove the 'greyest' zone of all. In 1984, Raúl Alfonsín, under intense pressure from the army, promulgated a controversial law, 'law 23.049, usually referred to as the Due Obedience Law [*Ley de Obediencia Debida*], which allowed lower-ranking personnel to claim [judicial impunity on the grounds] that they had merely been "following orders"'.⁴⁹² Two years later, he set a cut-off date or *Punto final* for court proceedings on the 'War'. Neither ordinance mentioned the crime of child-abduction. Neither amnesty extended to the trade in babies. The infants who had 'disappeared' during the junta were hard to trace, harder for families to name and claim; 'o fueron anotados como hijos propios, [...] o fueron adoptados con adopción plena, la que en [Argentina] borra el vínculo con la familia de sangre' (XLIX).⁴⁹³ But the *Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo* succeeded in identifying fifty-one such minors, putting to their foster parents the very question that the fictive Alicia had asked, in 1985, of Sara – minus the 'if'. 'Si es su nieta, ¿qué hacemos?' (L) The civilian adults involved could not be indicted: stricture and *indulto* alike excluded them. 'En nuestro país,' wrote one bereaved grandmother, 'se juzgó a los militares pero no a sus cómplices, [...] a los que entregaban a los menores en guarda sabiendo su origen' (LI).⁴⁹⁴ The children's responses were

⁴⁹¹ Leys, p. 269.

⁴⁹² Feitlowitz, p. 14.

⁴⁹³ Estela Carlotto, 'El robo de niños y la impunidad en Argentina', *Ko'aga Roñe'eta* 3, (1996), <http://www.derechos.org/koaga/iii/3/carlotto.html>.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

complex and varied. A few applauded their first sequestration, rejecting blood-ties with the 'left'.

By the year 2000, thirty-one 'lost' sons and daughters had, nonetheless, been returned to their natural relatives.⁴⁹⁵ Crucially, moreover, the cases fought by the *Abuelas* gave the lie to the new 'truths' that Menem had sought to establish, *re-writing* history across the *tabula rasa* of his would-be forgetful, pardoned, land. Eight years after the P.R.N.'s 'exoneration' Videla was arrested, to general surprise, again. 'Aunque fue indultado [...] en diciembre de 1990', reported *Clarín*, 'el juez Marquevich entendió que por el robo de bebés [...] todavía puede ser detenido y eventualmente condenado' (LII).⁴⁹⁶ In 1999, Massera made the headlines, 'acusa[do]', in his turn, 'de ser "autor mediato" en [...] casos de sustracción de menores y supresión de identidad' (LIII).⁴⁹⁷ Other cases soon came to court. The principle of 'justice' as Derrida construes it – the on-going concern with those debarred, by age or stage, from speaking up – had won out for now over 'justice' in the narrow sense, added legal substance to the disappeareds' cause. And the spectre of the victim of violence had come back, as I shall shortly reiterate, to disrupt the seamless continuities of the present, the 'given' orders of politics, of affects and 'things'.

⁴⁹⁵ Figures given on the organization's website, 'Historia y logros de las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo', <http://wamani.apc.org/abuelas/historia/html>.

⁴⁹⁶ Gerardo Young, 'Detienen a Videla en un caso por robo de bebés', *Clarín*, 10 June 1998, <http://ar.clarin.com/diario/98-06-10/t-00201d.htm>.

⁴⁹⁷ Silvana Boschi, 'Robo de bebés: Massera sigue procesado y detenido', *Clarín*, 23 September 1999, <http://www.clarin.com.ar/diario/99-09-23/t-00501d.htm>. At the time of writing, both Videla and Massera remain in detention.

CONCLUSION

Eight years before the publication of 'Recortes de prensa', Julio Cortázar travelled from his home in Paris to Brussels, to participate in the second session of the Second Russell Tribunal. The first such tribunal had been initiated by Bertrand Russell, anxious to investigate and publicize North American war crimes in Vietnam at a time when 'human rights' did not yet feature in official U.S. policy. The second was charged with scrutinizing the record of Latin America's armies; and the assembled writers and scholars were quick to voice their concern over abuses that threatened to engulf whole states. Without the backing of any current government, however, 'the Tribunal was not able to put into effect recommendations' – or condemnations – of conditions in countries as diverse as Paraguay and Guatemala, as distant as Chile, Brazil and Haiti.⁴⁹⁸ Its best hope was to have an impact on those who maybe one day could. And Cortázar decided to contribute to that cause by appending Tribunal documents to his next publication, *Fantomas contra los vampiros multinacionales*, a work whose Argentine narrator, likewise, goes to Brussels, whose narrator, likewise, laments torture's range and spread.

Pensó en el pasado y el presente de su país, en el retorno de un estado de cosas en el que las peores torturas parecían moneda corriente. Muy atrás, en la pantalla alargada del siglo pasado, galopaban en el recuerdo los mazorqueros de Juan Manuel de Rosas, un primer plano mostraba sus facones en la garganta de los prisioneros unitarios ... Cosas así sucedían diariamente en Buenos Aires, en las provincias, con música de radio apagando los alaridos, con noticias de diarios amordazados por el miedo que lo reducían todo a términos como mutilaciones, apremios y vejámenes, la misma Mazorca elogiada en actos públicos, la misma barbarie presentada como reconquista de una patria en la que se hundían hora a hora los cuchillos de la desgracia y el desprecio (I).⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁸ Jean Franco, 'Comic Stripping: Cortázar in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Alonso, pp. 36-56 (p. 54, n. 48).

⁴⁹⁹ *Fantomas contra los vampiros multinacionales: una utopía realizable* (Mexico City: Excelsior, 1975; repr. Buenos

The inquiry into contemporary violence, in this text, is also patently an inquiry into that which recurs, *ce qui revient*. The figure of the *mazorquero*, the sadistic vigilante, slides like a Derridean spectre ‘between’ genealogy and history, between synchrony and diachrony, between now and then. *Fantomas*, to reprise a phrase from my first chapter, tells us stories of one specific ‘apparition’ – the apparition of institutionalized brutality in the mid 1970s – and of a string of others too, of atrocities perpetrated in the name of Juan Manuel de Rosas’s despotic government, *la Mazorca*, of nineteenth-century Unitarians slain in the name of unity. Yet the form Cortázar lends his narrative is neither docudrama nor novel, neither realist nor (entirely) fictional. Events here will be related half in prose, and half in graphic comic strip. The eponymous protagonist, indeed, is not the author’s own creation, but a progeny of pulp paperbacks, of cheap cartoons: an arch-villain turned arch-hero who made his début, in 1911, with the memorable words,

— Fantômas!
 — Vous dites?
 — Je dis ... Fantômas.
 — Cela signifie quoi?
 — Rien ... et tout!
 — Pourtant, qu’est-ce que c’est?
 — Personne ... mais cependant quelqu’un!
 — Enfin, que fait-il ce quelqu’un?
 — Il fait peur!!!⁵⁰⁰

It is to *Fantomas* that Cortázar’s narrator (or, to quote Jean Franco, ‘Cortázar-as-narrator’) turns for assistance when his train journey home is interrupted, when a ‘new’ terror comes to compliment the crimes that the Tribunal’s delegates had heard of and denounced.⁵⁰¹ This terror, broadly speaking, is an assault – an onslaught even – upon learning, a wave of manuscript-thefts, then arson. The *Bibliothèque nationale* loses its Prousts, the British Library, its Chaucers, and serial views of Tokyo, Moscow, Washington show libraries on fire across the globe. There are, captions announce, no Bibles left on any shelves. Worse still, once the narrator reaches Paris, he finds a pile of

Aires: GenteSur, 1989), pp. 26-28.

⁵⁰⁰ Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, *Fantômas* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1911; repr. Paris: Presses Pocket, 1977), p. 7. The circumflex was dropped from ‘Fantômas’ in Spanish versions of this novel and its sequels.

⁵⁰¹ ‘Comic Stripping’, p. 50 (my emphasis).

death-threats awaiting him, and a telephone ringing off the hook as Borges, Paz, Sontag, Moravia all call to say they too will die if they insist on writing books. With Fantomas on the case, moreover, it rapidly proves clear that litera-phobia is just the tip of the iceberg, a harbinger of other ills. ‘Ahora él y muchos más sabemos que la destrucción de las bibliotecas no es más que un prólogo. Lástima que yo no sea buena dibujante, porque me pondría en seguida a preparar la segunda parte de la historia, la verdadera’ (II).⁵⁰²

What the ‘second half’ of the tale, the ‘true half’, might be never explicitly emerges. *Fantomas contra los vampiros multinacionales* is a perplexing text from start to finish, a ‘who-dun-it’ without motives, evidence or successful ‘sleuths’. The nearest we are given to a clue, perhaps, lies in the title – for vampires feed on blood not ink. The nearest we are given to a moral, perhaps, is ‘Susan Sontag’s flip comment, ‘¿Qué son los libros al lado de quienes los leen?’ (III). Whilst Fantomas does apprehend one criminal, who confesses to the book-burnings, his mission appears incomplete, his victory a fleeting triumph in a war with many fronts. ‘Cayó’, observes Sontag, ‘en la peor trampa, la de creer que su misión había terminado’ (IV). ‘Los diarios’, adds the narrator, noticing public interest in Fantomas wane, ‘pasaron rápidamente a temas tales como las últimas performances de Emerson Fittipaldi, el precio del bife, las ejecuciones o atentados de turno, la mode *retro* y el nuevo *boom* de Hollywood’ (V). The ill-defined combat ‘against the multinationals’, it is implied, must render one-man tactics like his anachronistic; the challenge to corporations that are complicit in oppression is too much for him alone.

Fantomas himself has other views – and in those views, I would suggest, lie the traces of a conclusion which ‘Julio Cortázar’ and his friends do not draw: an inference that the ‘glass’ may be half-empty, but it may also be half-full. ‘La soledad es mi fuerza, Julio’, proclaims the hero. ‘La soledad y mi don de transformarme infinitamente, llegar al enemigo bajo las apariencias más dispares’ (VI).⁵⁰³ There has, for all that, been one constant in the changing presentation of this master of disguise: a mask that functions, as Hamlet’s father’s visor did, to show up an ‘intangible’ which would otherwise (in Fantomas legend) remain ‘shrouded in mist’, to clothe and cast a someone who is no-one, and nothing.⁵⁰⁴ ‘Personne ... mais cependant quelqu’un!’ He is, to put it differently, a metaphor for the in-between, the spectral, the ‘hauntic’, a glamorous counterpart to Kateb’s errant Keblouti or Djébar’s *alouettes*. And though Fantomas cannot win the war

⁵⁰² *Fantomas contra los vampiros*, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁰³ Ibid, p. 35, p. 42.

⁵⁰⁴ Elliot Smith and Robin Walz, ‘The Fantômas Website’, <http://www.fantomas-lives.com>.

on torture, on abduction, he too provides a focus and a locus for resistance to their use, a reminder that some small battles may sometimes be won.

APPENDIX: TRANSLATIONS FROM THE SPANISH*

INTRODUCTION

(I) *Me gustó que en el trabajo del escultor no hubiera nada de sistemático o demasiado explicativo, que cada pieza constuviera algo de enigma y que a veces fuera necesario mirar largamente para comprender la modalidad que en ella asumía la violencia; las esculturas me parecieron al mismo tiempo ingenuas y sutiles, en todo caso sin tremendismo ni extorsión sentimental. Incluso la tortura, esa forma última en que la violencia se cumple en el horror de la inmovilidad y el aislamiento, no había sido mostrada con la dudosa minucia de tantos afiches y textos y películas que volvían a mi memoria también dudosa, también demasiado pronta a guardar imágenes y devolverlas para vaya a saber qué oscura complacencia. Pensé que si escribía el texto que me había pedido el escultor, si escribo el texto que me pedís, le dije, será un texto como esas piezas, jamás me dejaré llevar por la facilidad que demasiado abunda en ese terreno.*

I was glad there wasn't anything systematic or too explicative in the sculptor's work, that each piece had something of an enigma about it and that sometimes one had to look for a long time in order to understand the modality that violence assumed there; [...] the sculpture seemed to be at the same time naïve and subtle, in any case without any sense of dread or sentimental exaggeration. Even torture, that last form in which violence takes the place of the horror of immobility and isolation, had not been shown with the doubtful trifle of so many posters and texts and movies that returned to my memory, also doubtful, also ready to hold the images and give them back for who knows what kind of obscure pleasure. I said to myself that if I wrote the text the sculptor had asked me to, if I write the text you ask me to, I told him, it will be a text like these pieces, I'll never let myself be carried away by the facility that all too often abounds in this field (pp. 82-83).

(II) *De cuerpos y [de] cabezas, de brazos y de manos.*

[Of] bodies and heads, arms and hands (p. 82).

(III) *Domiciliada en Atoyac, número 26, distrito 10, Colonia Cuauhtémoc, México 5.*

Domiciled at No. 26 Atoyac, District 10, Colonia Cuauhtémoc, Mexico 5 (p. 83).

(IV) *Hecho: A las diez de la mañana del 24 de diciembre de 1975 fue secuestrada por personal del Ejército argentino (Batallón 601) en su puesto de trabajo [Aída Leonora Bruschtein Bonaparte] [...] Hecho: el 11 de junio de 1976, a las 12 de mediodía, llegan [al] departamento de [Santiago Bruschtein] [...] un grupo de militares vestidos de civil. [...] Le obligaron a levantarse, y [...] lo subieron a un automóvil. [...] Hecho: El día 11 de marzo de 1977, a las 6 de la mañana, llegaron al departamento donde vivían [Irene Mónica Bruschtein Bonaparte de Ginzberg y su marido, Mario Ginzberg] fuerzas conjuntas del Ejército y la policía, llevándose a la pareja y dejando a sus hijitos: Victoria, de dos años y seis meses, y Hugo Roberto, de un año y seis meses, abandonados en la puerta del edificio.*

Fact: At ten o'clock in the morning of December 24, 1975, [Aída Leonora Bruschtein Bonaparte] was kidnapped by personnel of the Argentine army (601st Battalion) at her place of employment. [...] *Fact:* on June 11, 1976, at 12 noon, a group of military men in civilian clothes came to [Santiago Bruschtein's] apartment. [...] They made him get out of bed, and [...] put him into a car. [...] *Fact:* On March 11, 1977, at six in the morning, a joint force of army and police came to the apartment where [Irene Mónica Bruschtein Bonaparte de Ginzberg and her husband, Mario Ginzberg] lived, taking the couple away and leaving behind their small children: Victoria, two years, six months old, and Hugo Roberto, one year, six months, abandoned at the door of the building (pp. 83-87).

(V) *Todo esto no sirve de nada.*

* Where a published version of the text exists, I have given a page reference to the edition listed in the bibliography. Where it does not, the translation is my own. Film quotations are transcribed from the subtitles used in U.K. distribution.

All this is worth nothing (p. 85).

(VI) *Yo me paso meses haciendo estas mierdas, vos escribís libros, [...] casi llegamos a creer que las cosas están cambiando, y entonces te bastan dos minutos de lectura para comprender de nuevo la verdad.*

I've spent months making this shit, you write books, [...] we almost come to believe that things are changing, and then all you need is two minutes of reading to understand the truth again (p. 85).

(VII) *Aunque no creo necesario decirlo, el primer recorte es real y el segundo imaginario.*

Although I don't think it's really necessary to say so, the first clipping is real and the second one imaginary (p. 81).

(VIII) *De mi hija sólo me ofrecieron ver las manos cortadas y puestas en un frasco, que lleva el número 24.*

All they would show me of my daughter were the hands cut off her body and placed in a jar that carried the number 24 (p. 85).

(IX) *Lo que quedaba de su cuerpo no podía ser entregado, porque era secreto militar.*

What remained of her body could not be turned over because it was a military secret (p. 85).

(X) *Pasó hace tres años como pudo pasar anoche o como puede estar pasando en este mismo momento en Buenos Aires o en Montevideo.*

It happened three years ago, just as it could have happened last night and can be happening at this very moment in Buenos Aires or Montevideo (p. 83).

(XI) — *Eso es cosa tuya, [...] — me dijo—. Yo sé que no es fácil, llevamos tanta sangre en los recuerdos que a veces uno se siente culpable de ponerle límites, de manejarlo para que no nos inunde del todo.*

'That's up to you', [...] he said to me. 'I know it's not easy, we carry so much blood in our memories that sometimes you feel guilty when you put a limit on it, channel it so it doesn't flood us out completely' (p. 82).

(XII) *¿— Qué te pasa?*

"What's wrong?" (p. 90).

(XIII) *Pedazos de imágenes volviendo desde un recorte de diario, las manos cortadas [...] y puestas en un frasco que lleva el número 24, [...] la toalla en la boca, los cigarrillos encendidos, y Victoria, de dos años y seis meses, y Hugo Roberto, de un año y seis meses, abandonados en la puerta del edificio. Cómo saber cuánto duró, cómo entender que también yo, también yo aunque me creyera del buen lado también yo, cómo aceptar que también yo ahí del otro lado de manos cortadas y de fosas comunes, también yo del otro lado de las muchachas torturadas y fusiladas esa misma noche de Navidad...*

Pieces of images coming back out of a newspaper clipping, the hands cut off [...] and put in a jar that bore the number twenty-four, [...] the towel over her mouth, the lighted cigarettes, and Victoria, two years and six months old, and Hugo Roberto, one year and six months, abandoned at the door of the building. How could I know how long it lasted, how could I understand that I too, I too even though I thought I was on the right side, I too, how could I accept that I too there on the other side from the cut-off hands and the common graves, I too on the other side from the girls tortured and shot that same Christmas night... (p. 93).

(XIV) *Lo que vino después pude haberlo visto en una película o leído en un libro.*

What came afterward I could have seen in a movie or read in a book (p. 92).

(XV) *¡Ah, si yo hubiera estado ahí con mis francos!*

"Oh, if only I had been there with my Franks!" (p. 87).

(XVI) *Yo estaba ahí como sin estar.*

I was there as if not being there (p. 92).

(XVII) *Aunque caminé mirando cada casa y crucé la acera opuesta como recordaba haberlo hecho, no reconocí ningún portal que se pareciera al de esa noche, la luz caía sobre las cosas como una infinita máscara, [...] ningún acceso a un buerto interior.*

Even though I walked along looking at every house and crossed over to the opposite sidewalk as I remembered having done, I couldn't recognize any entranceway that looked like the one from that night, the light fell on to things like an infinite mask, [...] no access to an inner garden (p. 96).

(XVIII) *La nena sí estaba.*

The little girl was there (p. 96).

2. REBIRTH IN SORROW: *LA BATAILLE D'ALGER*

NOTES

(I) *Mi hermana ya estaba desaparecida, llamaban por teléfono a mi casa y ponían una grabación del disco 'Late un corazón'; se escuchaban el silbido de un hombre que se alejaba y la voz de una mujer quejándose.*

My sister was disappeared, and they phoned my house and played the song, *Late un corazón* [...] you could hear [...] [only] the sound of a man whistling and a woman groaning in pain. (p. 796.)

4. ON LUISA VALENZUELA AND PETRONILLA DE HEATH

(I) *Algo de esto ha sido vivido antes, aunque quizá no directamente por ella. Algo está allí al borde de su memoria tratando de expresarse y ella quiere y no quiere recuperarlo. Quiere, y se esfuerza, y sabe que es muy necesario, vital casi, y quedándose muy quieta con los ojos cerrados presiente que va a poder recomponerse, encontrar las piezas de algún rompecabezas interno y por ahí el recuerdo le sirva para entender algo de toda esta incongruencia.*

There's something familiar about all this, although not perhaps as experienced by her. There's something on the edge of her memory trying to find expression and she both wants and doesn't want to recover it. Yes, she does want to and she struggles to do so, knowing how important, indeed vital, it is, and lying very still with her eyes closed, she senses that she will be able to put herself back together again, to find the pieces of an internal jigsaw puzzle and that her memory will then help her to understand a little of this whole incongruous business (pp. 89-90).

(II) *Palabras malas, aquellas que podrían perturbar el [...] orden del discurso masculino.*

Bad words, words that might unsettle the masculine order of discourse.

(III) *De haber emitido las palabras que le habían sido impuestas, [palabras buenas]. Pobre Petronilla [...]. Pobre todas nosotras.*

Of having uttered the words that had been imposed on her, good words. Alas for Petronilla. [...] Alas for all [us] women.

(IV) *Este pueblo ésta lleno de ecos. Tal parece que estuvieran encerrados en en el hueco de las paredes o debajo de las piedras.*

This town [/nation] is filled with echoes. It's like they were trapped behind the walls, or beneath the cobblestones (p. 40).

(V) *Primero la patria, luego el partido y después los hombres.*

First priority, the country, then, the party, after that, human beings.

(VI) *En la Argentina [...] recibimos primero la influencia francesa y luego la norteamericana [...] Es necesario aclarar que el enfoque francés era más correcto que el norteamericano: aquel apuntaba a la concepción global y éste al hecho militar exclusivamente o casi exclusivamente. [...] El conflicto mundial en curso [para los franceses] no era [...] ni ideológico, ni psicológico, ni frío. [...] [Era] la guerra en la cual cada adversario emplea[ba] todas las fuerzas disponibles, violentas y no violentas, para hacer ceder al otro beligerante, conquistarlo u obligarlo a renunciar a sus objetivos políticos.*

In Argentina, we were influenced first by the French and then by the North Americans. [...] It is important to clarify that the French perspective was more apt than the North American: the former had a global outlook, whilst the latter were all but exclusively preoccupied with military matters. [...] [For the French], the world war in progress was [...] neither ideological, nor psychological, nor cold. It was a war in which each side would use every means available -- both violent and non-violent -- to put down the aggressor, to conquer him or to force him to renounce his political objectives.

(VII) *El terrorista no sólo es considerado tal por matar con un arma o colocar una bomba, sino también por activar a través de ideas contrarias a nuestra civilización occidental y cristiana.*

A terrorist is not only to be thought of as someone who kills with a weapon or places a bomb; he is also someone who fosters ideas which are antipathetic to our Western, Christian, civilization.

(VIII) *Aquellos que se apartan del normal desarrollo del 'Proceso' [...] se convierten en cómplices de esa subversión que debemos destruir, lo mismo que a quienes no se atreven a asumir las responsabilidades que esta situación impone.*

Those who deviate from the course taken by the 'Process' [...] become accomplices of that subversion which must be destroyed, as do those who lack the courage to assume the responsibilities imposed by this situation (p. 369).

(IX) *Bastaba figurar en una agenda de teléfonos para pasar [...] a ser 'blanco'.*

It was enough to appear in somebody's address book to [...] become a 'target' (pp. 60-61).

(X) *Lo cierto [...] es que aquí y en todo el mundo, en estos momentos, luchan los que están a favor de la muerte y los que estamos a favor de la vida. [...] Estamos combatiendo contra nihilistas, contra delirantes de destrucción. [...] [Y] no vamos a combatir hasta la muerte, vamos a combatir hasta la victoria, esté más allá o más acá de la muerte.*

What is certain [...] is that here, and throughout the world, those who favour death are currently battling with those who favour life. [...] We are up against nihilists, against devotees of destruction. [...] And we will not merely fight to the death; we will fight for victory, whether victory comes before death or beyond it.

(XI) *Utilizaban un aparato de alta potencia que, cuando era aplicado, provocaba la contracción de la lengua.*

They used a high-voltage device which, when applied, caused the tongue to contract (p. 36).

(XII) *Un miércoles de traslado pido a gritos que me traslade: 'A mí..., a mí..., 571' [...] ya no era Lisandro Raúl Cubas, era un número..*

One Wednesday, transfer day, I shouted for them to have me transferred: 'Me... me... 571' [...] I was no longer Lisandro Raúl Cubas, I was a number (p. 57).

(XIII) *El silencio es salud.*

Silence is health.

(XIV) *Se borraba del mapa la Plaza de Mayo durante las dos o tres horas de las habituales manifestaciones de los jueves*

Every Thursday, for the two or three hours during which the demonstration took place, the Plaza de Mayo was wiped off the map (p. 87).

(XV) *Los de la tevé son los únicos muertos a que ten[ían] derecho.*

[They were] only allowed to talk about the deaths announced on television (p. 52, translation modified).

(XVI) *Brujas como aquella a la que hace referencia Pennethorne Hughes en el libro La brujería: 'El ama de llaves de Alice Kyteler, Petronilla de Heath, confirmó los cargos por lo cual fue necesario azotarla seis veces más siguiendo las instrucciones del obispo. Cuando lo poco que quedaba de ella fue de nuevo llevado a prisión para que se la azotase por séptima vez confirmó todo lo que los jueces quisieron. Fue conducida a la ciudad y quemada públicamente, mientras juraba contra el clero y despreciaba y maldecía a los verdugos.'*

Witches like the one to whom Pennethorne Hughes refers in his book *Witchcraft*: 'Alice Kyteler's housekeeper, Petronilla de Heath, pleaded guilty to the charges, for which it was necessary to whip her a further six times, as the bishop had instructed. When the little that remained of her was carried to prison for a seventh whipping, she confessed to everything that the judges wished to hear. She was taken into town and burned publicly, cursing the clergy [through the flames] and pouring scorn and insults on her executioners.'

(XVII) *Un momento de libertad para expresarse con toda fuerza antes de la muerte.*

A moment of freedom to express herself, with all her force, before death.

(XVIII) *La respuesta habría que tratar de concretarla por el lado de las brujas: aquello en lo que no se cree – o quisiera no creerse o no se pudiera creer – pero que las hay, las hay*

The answer must be sought amongst the witches: amongst those in whom we do not believe – or in whom we do not want to believe or in whom we cannot believe – but who do exist, who do.

(IXX) *Escribir con el cuerpo quiere decir – en parte [...] – no salir buyendo de aquellos impulsos que minan al raciocinio puro y lo tuercen y lo contaminan.*

Writing the body means – partly [...] – resisting the temptation to flee those impulses that undermine pure reason, which twist it and contaminate it.

(XX) *Un grupo de personas que estaba protegiendo a gente perseguida.*

A group of people who were protecting the persecuted.

(XXI) *Le digo que ella es una bruja [...] Ojalá existiera la Inquisición, ahora, buena falta hace una mano dura para darle a ella.*

She's a witch I tell you [...] the Inquisition is what we need, somebody with a heavy hand to deal with her (p. 32).

(XXII) *[Un tiempo] cuando ella y su hermana gemela [...] peleaban [juntas] [...] Después no, ya no, atadas de pies y manos y humilladas. Entonces la imposibilidad de hacer nada y [...] el perder de vista.*

[A time] when she and her twin sister [...] used to fight for the same cause [...] Not later, no, trapped as they had been, tortured and humiliated. The impossibility then of doing anything [...] losing sight (p. 57).

(XXIII) *Página cero.*

Page zero (p. 5).

(XXIV) *[Un] espacio [que] no es el euclidiano [...] [y un] tiempo [que no es] éste del que tenemos una pobre conciencia al ver envejecer nuestro pellejo.*

A space [...] [which] is not Euclidian space [...] [and a] time [which is not] the same time of which we're dimly aware when we see our skin ageing (p. 101).

(XXV) *Capilla ardiente de [los] demonios.*

Mortuary chapel of demons (p. 96).

(XXVI) *Cuadro patológico.*

Pathological framework (p. 83).

(XXVII) *¡Es ella! [...] es ella, la santa, por fin el milagro.*

It is she, it is she, the holy one. The miracle at last (p. 134).

(XXVIII) *El descubrimiento. El viaje. El encuentro.*

The Discovery. The Journey. The Encounter (p. 7, p. 94, p. 125).

(XXIX) *La pérdida.*

The Loss (p. 67).

(XXX) *Tengo miedo de dispersarme, de no saber diagnosticar mi mal, [...] tengo miedo de integrarme a ella*

I'm afraid of falling apart, of not knowing how to diagnose my illness ... I'm afraid of becoming one with her (p. 83).

(XXXI) *Si AZ conociera estos detalles, si él hubiera tenido acceso a cierta información, su [...] tortura, [...] y hasta quizá su muerte, habrían tenido para él una razón de ser.*

If AZ had known [certain] [...] details he might have interpreted the symbols, [...] if he had had access to certain information, his torture [...] and perhaps even his death, would have gained a rationale, a reason for being (p. 66, translation modified).

(XXXII) *Allá voy, allá voy, allá.*

I am going, [...] I am going, going (p. 91).

(XXXIII) *Subo, bajo. Estoy hecho para andar en la noche.*

I go up, go down; I am made to wander in the night (p. 102, p. 101).

(XXXIV) *Lo intolerable: la causa que justifica los efectos, la explicación racional infiltrándose en medio de toda la irracionalidad que implica la conducta humana.*

The one intolerable thing: the cause that justifies the ends, the rational explanation creeping in the middle of all the irrationality that human conduct implies (p. 66, translation modified).

(XXXV) *Licuefacción de [la] persona.*

Liquefaction of the personality (p. 83, translation modified).

(XXXVI) *Tengo miedo de ser sólo un fantasma en el recuerdo.*

I'm afraid of being only a ghost in the memory (p. 50).

(XXXVII) *[Un] fluir, [...] [una] arbitraria cadena de causas y de efectos.*

[A] flow, [...] [an] arbitrary chain of causes and effects (p. 75).

(XXXVIII) *Apúrese. Usted tiene que llegar antes que nosotros para romper las apariencias*

Hurry. You must get there before we do and destroy appearances (p. 128).

(XXIX) *Luz sorda, luz [...] intensísima, [...] como un diamante.*

Silent [...] intense light, [...] like a diamond (p. 134).

(XL) *Laura, que todos los días sean para nosotros dos iguales a este feliz día de nuestra unión*

Laura, may all our days be as happy as the day that brought us together (p. 111).

(XLI) *¿Se siente bien ahora? Su esposo nos contó que había tenido problemas con la espalda ¿Usted es tucumana, no?*

Are you feeling well now? Your husband told us you'd had some back problems. You're from Tucumán, aren't you? (p. 119).

(XLII) *Le han dicho que se llama Laura pero eso [...] forma parte de la nebulosa en la que transcurre su vida*

She's been told she's called Laura, but that's [...] part of the haze in which her life drifts by (pp. 105-106).

(XLIII) *No le asombra [...] el hecho de estar sin memoria. Lo que sí la tiene bastante preocupada es [...] [la] capacidad suya para aplicarle el nombre a cada cosa y recibir una taza de té cuando dice quiero [...] una taza de té.*

She doesn't find it [...] surprising that she has no memory. She is quite concerned about [...] her capacity to find the right word for each thing and receive a cup of tea when she says I want [...] a cup of tea (p. 105).

(XLIV) *Los nombres, La planta, Los espejos, La ventana.*

The Names. The Plant. The Mirrors. The Window (p. 109, p. 111, p. 113, p. 115).

(XLV) *No quiero saber nada, dejame. [...] No quiero*

I don't want to know anything. Leave me alone [...] I don't want to (p. 132).

(XLVI) *Se pone a gritar desesperada, a aullar como si fueran a distriparla o a violarla con ese mismo cabo del talero, [...] más [...] vale dejar el rebenque para otro momento.*

She starts to scream desperately, howling as though she were going to be ripped apart or raped with the grip of this weapon [...] better leave the whip for some other time (p. 122).

(XLVII) *Sin reconocerla [...] como si acabara de crecer sobre la boca.*

Without recognizing it, like it had just appeared above her mouth a second before (p. 111, translation modified).

(XLVIII) *[La] amnesia acentúa [la] dependencia de [Laura], sus carencias relacionales, y su falta de autoconocimiento. [...] Los menguados restos de subjetividad que le quedan residen en su cuerpo [...] el cuerpo deviene locus de saberes que la conciencia ha obturada. Allí permanecen los vestigios de una incompleta identidad, de la diferencia.*

Amnesia accentuates Laura's dependency, her affective deficiencies, and her lack of self-awareness. [...] The few remnants of subjectivity left to her reside in her body, [...] the body becomes the locus of knowledge that consciousness has wiped out. It is there that traces of an (incomplete) identity, of difference, remain.

(XLIX) *Fui yo. Yo solo, ni los dejé que te tocaran, yo solo, abí con vos, lastimándote [...] para quebrarte como se quiebra un caballo [...] tenías órdenes de matarme [...] [pero] te iba a obligar [...] a quererme.*

I did it [...]. I did it all alone, I didn't let them lay a hand on you, all alone, there with you, hurting you [...] to break you, just like a horse. [...] You had orders to kill me [...] [but] I'd force you to love me (p. 134).

(I) *Ella ve [la] espalda que se aleja y [...] empieza a entender [...] la función de este instrumento negro. [...] Entonces lo levanta y apunta.*

She sees his back move away, and [...] she [...] starts to understand what that black instrument is for. [...] She lifts it and aims (p. 135).

(II) *La Bella Durmiente – va sufriendo mutaciones y [...] se convierte en sapo para trastrocar la irrealdad en la que viv[e].*

Sleeping Beauty – starts to mutate and finally becomes a toad, so that she may break apart the ‘irreality’, the dream world in which she lives.

(LII) *Aquellos impulsos que minan al raciocinio [...] y lo tuercen y lo contaminan, que nos impulsa[n] a movernos, a bailar y respirar.*

Those impulses that undermine reason, [...] which twist it and contaminate it, which compel us to move, to dance and breathe.

(LIII) *Como si hubiera tocado la viscosa piel de un escuerzo.*

As though she’d touched the viscous skin of a toad (pp. 132-133).

NOTES

(LIV) *Quedan abolidos para siempre la pena de muerte por causas políticas, toda especie de tormento, los azotes.*

Political executions, every kind of torture and the lash shall be forever outlawed.

(LV) *Un aparato que [...] había servido para torcer los testículos [...], una prensa que se utilizaba para apretar los dedos, [y] un cinturón de cuero con el que se hacía presión en el cuerpo y al que llamaban camisa de fuerza.*

A device which [...] had been employed to twist testicles, [...] a press which was used to crush fingers, [and] a leather girdle that compressed the torso, known as the ‘camisa de fuerza’.

(LVI) *El mal no es actual, [...] es una costumbre inveterada.*

This is not a problem of the moment, [...] it is an ingrained habit.

(LVII) *Entre mayo de 1952 – dos meses antes de que muriera – y julio de 1954, el Vaticano recibió casi cuarenta mil cartas de laicos atribuyendo a Evita varios milagros y exigiendo que el Papa la canonizara.*

Between May 1952 – two months before she died – and July 1954, the Vatican received nearly forty thousand letters from laymen and laywomen attributing various miracles to Evita and urging the Pope to canonize her (p. 72).

5. LA HISTORIA OFICIAL: WHERE THE CAMERA TIPS THE CRADLE

(I) *Alguien le dijo a ella hace poco, [...] que más vale no pensar ni recordar. Como una amenaza, casi, se lo dijo, y ya ni se acuerda quién fue. Se ve que es fácil de aprender, eso de olvidar.*

Someone had told her [...] it was better not to think or remember. They’d said it almost like a threat and now she can’t even remember who it was. It’s obviously easily learnt this forgetting (p. 53).

(II) *Lleno de ausencias*

(III) *Mi barrio era así, así, así ...*

Es decir, qué sé yo si era así ...

Alguien dijo una vez

que yo me fui de mi barrio.

¿Cuándo, pero cuándo?

Si siempre estoy llegando.

Si una vez me olvidé,

las estrellas de la esquina

de la casa de mi vieja,

titilando como si fueran

manos amigas, me dijeron,

‘Gordo, Gordo, quedate aquí’

(IV) *¡El club ya es nuestro!*

‘Now the club is ours!’ (p. 121).

(V) *¿Y el país?*

‘And the country?’ (p. 121).

(VI) *¿La gente sabía lo que estaba pasando por aquí?*

Surely people knew what was going on here?

(VII) *Los que no sabían, lo sospechaban.*

And those who didn’t know suspected.

(VIII) *Termina con esta historia. Sabes que nuestro hijo no puede ser...*

Stop this. You know our son’s ...

(IX) *Yo no sé nada [...] nuestro hijo es un ser humano vivo*

I know nothing. [...] Our son’s a living human being.

(X) *Está en mis pasos, [...] está en mis gritos.*

He’s in my every step, [...] he’s in my every cry.

(XI) *Todos están muertos.*

They’re all dead.

(XII) *El no.*

He isn’t.

(XIII) *Mayo de 1969. La guerra del pueblo ha comenzado. Obreros y estudiantes [...] ocuparon la ciudad de Córdoba. Esta es [una] reacción espontánea [...] contra el opresión, el hambre, la injusticia y la persecución del gobierno militar.*

May, 1969. The people’s war has begun. Workers and students have occupied the city of Córdoba. It’s the people’s spontaneous reaction to oppression, hunger, [injustice] and persecution by the military government.

(XIV) *Que [sometía] la vida comunitaria al cotidiano, depresivo y frustratorio influjo de [los hechos pasados] y [mantenía] abierta los beridos que causaron.*

Which [subjected] community life to the daily, depressing and frustrating influence of [past events] and [kept] the wounds they caused from healing.

(XV) *[A] pone[rse] cargosos.*

[To] get heavy.

(XVI) *Suben siempre en esa parada, [...] el cementerio. El colectivo se llena de muertos en esta parada.*

They always get on at [...] the cemetery. The bus gets packed with dead people at that stop.

(XVII) *¿Y adónde van?*

And where do they go?

(XVIII) *Creo que a ninguna parte. [...] Pero si me ven, [...] empiezan a preguntarme por mamá, por los chicos, mis hermanos, si nos acordamos de ellos.*

Nowhere, I think. [...] But if they see me, they start asking about Mom, my brothers, if we remember them.

(XIX) *No lo ponga en la novela.*

Don't include that in your story.

(XX) *¿Es posible que el antónimo de 'el olvido' no sea 'la memoria' sino la justicia?*

Is it possible that the opposite of 'oblivion' might be justice, rather than 'memory'?

(XXI) *Lo que llamamos olvido en el sentido colectivo aparece cuando ciertos grupos humanos no logran ... transmitir a la posteridad lo que aprendieron del pasado.*

What we call oblivion in the collective sense arises when certain human groups fail ... to pass on, for posterity, what they learned from the past.

(XXII) *¿La gente no sabía lo que estaba pasando por aquí?*

Didn't people know what was going on here?

(XXIII) *Todos sabían.*

Everybody knew.

(XXIV) *En edad para pedir respuesta a la sociedad.*

Old enough to ask questions.

(XXV) *Somos todos ventrílocuos de nuestros viejos.*

We're all ventriloquists to our parents.

(XXVI) *Que el mate me dé amnesia, [...] [la capacidad para] olvidar todo esto, olvidar el recuerdo, desecharlo.*

I'd like to be amnesiac and forget [all] this, forget memories, throw them away.

(XXVII) *Me recuerdas una chica izquierdista ... hace veinte años, ¿sos izquierdista también?*

You remind me of a leftist girl ... some twenty years ago. Are you a leftist too?

(XXVIII) *Bocha, [...] mi mamá, mamá.*

Bocha, [...] Mummy, Mummy.

(XXIX) *La estética publicitaria, con sus rebuscados paneos de cámara sobre finos interiores y ropas exquisitas, acaba por deformar la temática del film.*

The advertising agency aesthetics – the studied panning shots across fine interiors, exquisite clothes – do eventually distort the theme of the film.

(XXX) *Porteña*

[Female] inhabitant of Buenos Aires.

(XXXI) *En el país de Nomeacuerdo
doy tres pasitos y me pierdo:
un pasito por allí
no recuerdo si lo dí;*

*un pasito para allá
¡ay! qué miedo me da ...*

In the land of I-don't-remember
I take three steps, and I'm lost forever
One step this way
I wonder if I may
One step over there
Oh, what a big scare.

(XXXII) *Yo no digo que sea ella, pero las fechas coinciden más o menos, ¿no?*

I'm not saying it's her, but the dates are right, aren't they?

(XXXIII) *No llore. No llore. Llorar no sirve ... Yo sé lo que digo, llorar no sirve.*

You mustn't cry. Crying doesn't help at all, ... I know what I'm saying, crying doesn't help.

(XXXIV) *No quedó nada, nada. Estas [...] fotos solamente.*

There was nothing left. Just these [...] photos.

(XXXV) *Yo era como Gaby. Estaba sentada en la mecedora de la abuela ... y no entendía por qué tardaban tanto. Se habían muerto los dos juntos en un accidente. La abuela, pobre, me hablaba de un viaje ... inventaba cartas ... Durante años los esperé ahí, sentada en esa mecedora. Creía que papá y mamá me había abandonado.*

I was Gaby's age. I was sitting in Grandma's rocking chair. I couldn't understand what was taking them so long. They were both killed in an accident. Poor Grandma! She said they'd gone away. She invented letters. For years, I just sat there waiting for them in the same rocking chair. I thought ... my parents had abandoned me.

(XXXVI) *Pasito a pasito*

[Little] step by [little] step

(XXXVII) *Entraron a patadas, me pusieron un pullover en la cabeza, y rompieron todo. Me llevaron en un auto con los pies de ellos encima. [...] Cuando me desperté estaba desnuda arriba de una mesa donde empezaban a picanearme. [...] Perdí un poco la noción del tiempo. [...] Todavía me despierto abogada a la mañana. Estoy allí colgada, y me meten la cabeza en un tacho de agua [...] Cuando salí de allí, me dijeron que había estado treinta y seis días. [...] Al principio, me libré de las violaciones. ¿Sabes por qué? Porque el que vino a casa, el único al que le miré la cara, me sonrió y me dijo: "A vos te voy a guardar para mí".*

They stormed in, threw a jumper over my head and destroyed everything. They took me in a car with their feet on me. [...] When I came round, I was naked on a table being given electric shocks. [...] I lost all sense of time. [...] I still wake up feeling I'm being drowned. They hang me upside down and shove my head in a pail of water. When they let me go they said I'd been there thirty-six days. [...] At first, I was lucky not to be raped. You know why? Because the one who came [to my] home, the only one whose face I saw said, 'I'm keeping you for myself'.

(XXXVIII) *¿Hiciste la denuncia?*

Did you report it?

(XXXIX) *¿Que buena idea! [...] Y vos, ¿a quién le hubieras hecho la denuncia?*

Now, that's a good idea! [...] Report it where, exactly?

(XL) *Nunca lo había contado. Lo escribí una sola vez, para la Comisión. ¡Increíble! ¡Me siento culpable!*

I never told anyone. I wrote about it once for the Commission. How incredible! I feel guilty.

(XLI) *¿Será verdad? [...] Habrá gente [...] que cambió de empleo, que está en otro lugar, ¿no?*

Is it true? [...] Some people may have changed jobs, [...] they may have moved.

(XLII) *¿Y a usted qué le importa lo que puede ser cierto?*

What do you care about the truth?

(XLIII) *Siempre es más fácil creer que no es posible, ¿no? Sobre todo porque para que sea posible, se necesitaría mucha complicidad, mucha gente que no lo podría creer, aunque lo tenga delante.*

It's easier to believe it's not possible. Because if it is possible, then an awful lot of people are guilty. Of not believing it, even when they see it.

(XLIV) *Treinta y seis días, [...] todo el tratamiento.*

Thirty-six days, [...] the full works.

(XLV) *Vivía con un subversivo. Lo que no entiendo es como podía volver a entrar y andar suelta.*

She lived with a subversive. What I don't understand is how she was allowed to come back, [...] and move about freely.

(XLVI) *Creo que es la primera vez que te veo con pollera. Te hizo bien Europa. Como si te hubiera allanado los bordes.*

I never saw you in a skirt before. Europe has done wonders. It has smoothed your edges.

(XLVII) *Es terrible [...] no saber dónde está tu hija.*

Terrible isn't it. Not to know where your daughter is.

(XLVIII) *¿Dónde está?*

Where is she?

(XLIX) *O fueron anotados como hijos propios, [...] o fueron adoptados con adopción plena, la que en [Argentina] borra el vínculo con la familia de sangre.*

They were either registered as the [adopted parents'] natural children [...] or adopted in the fullest sense of the word; that is to say, [in Argentina] that all record of their blood family was erased.

(I) *Si es su nieta, ¿qué hacemos?*

If she is your granddaughter, what are we going to do?

(LI) *En nuestro país se juzgó a los militares pero no a sus cómplices, [...] a los que entregaban a los menores en guarda sabiendo su origen.*

In our country, we judged the military but not their accomplices, [...] those who handed over minors for adoption, knowing where they came from.

(LII) *Aunque fue indultado [...] en diciembre de 1990 el juez Marquovich entendió que por el robo de bebés [...] todavía puede ser detenido y eventualmente condenado.*

Although he was pardoned [...] in December 1990, judge Marquovich deemed that [Videla] could still be arrested and potentially condemned for child-abduction.

(LIII) *Acusa[do] de ser "autor mediato" en [...] casos de sustracción de menores y supresión de la identidad..*

Accused of masterminding the theft of minors and the suppression of their identities.

NOTES

(LIV) *La demolición de la E.S.M.A. puede borrar pruebas que permitan establecer cuál fue el destino final de los miles de desaparecidos durante la dictadura militar.*

The demolition of the Navy Mechanics School could entail the destruction of evidence enabling us to establish the final destiny of those thousands who disappeared during the military dictatorship.

(LV) *Los militares cambiaron el sistema de señales, [y] en lugar de los viejos postes pintados de blanco que indicaban las paradas de colectivos [pusieron] [...] unos carteles que [decían]: Zona de detención.*

The military changed the sign-posting system, and replaced the old white poles marking bus stops with placards that read, 'Stopping/Detention Zone'.

(LVI) *[D]el terror nocturno que invadía todo.*

[Of] the nocturnal terror that invaded everything.

(LVII) *[De] los traslados y [d]el asesinato.*

[Of] the 'transfers', and [of] the killing.

(LVIII) *Una vez me llevaron preso. [...] Había que ser calladito, educadito, pelo corto a la gomina. [...] Ahora me gusta [ser así].*

CONCLUSION

(I) *Pensó en el pasado y el presente de su país, en el retorno de un estado de cosas en el que las peores torturas parecían moneda corriente. Muy atrás, en la pantalla alargada del siglo pasado, galopaban en el recuerdo los mazorqueros de Juan Manuel de Rosas, un primer plano mostraba sus facones en la garganta de los prisioneros unitarios ... Cosas así sucedían diariamente en Buenos Aires, en las provincias, con música de radio apagando los alaridos, con noticias de diarios amordazados por el miedo que lo reducían todo a términos como mutilaciones, apremios y vejámenes, la misma Mazorca elogiada en actos públicos, la misma barbarie presentada como reconquista de una patria en la que se hundían hora a hora los cuchillos de la desgracia y el desprecio.*

He thought about his country's past, and about its present, about the return of a state of affairs in which the worst forms of torture seemed commonplace. Way back, on the distant screen of the previous century, Juan Manuel de Rosas's *mazorqueros* [gaucho vigilantes] galloped through his memory, a close-up shot showing them brandishing their long daggers before the throats of Unitarian prisoners... Things like that were happening every day in Buenos Aires, in the provinces, with music from the radio drowning out the screams, newspaper articles gagged by a fear that led them to speak only of mutilations, of writs and distortions, the same *Mazorca* [Rosas's terrorist government] praised in public, the same barbarism presented as the re-conquest of a country into which the knives of disgrace and contempt were plunging ever deeper.

(II) *Ahora él y muchos más sabemos que la destrucción de las bibliotecas no es más que un prólogo. Lástima que yo no sea buena dibujante, porque me pondría en seguida a preparar la segunda parte de la historia, la verdadera.*

Now he and many others know that the destruction of the libraries is nothing more than a prologue. It's a shame I can't draw, for if I could I'd start drafting the second half of the story, the true half.

(III) *¿Qué son los libros al lado de quienes los leen?*

What are books compared with those who read them?

(IV) *Cayó en la peor trampa, la de creer que su misión había terminado.*

He fell into the worst trap: that of believing that his mission was over.

(V) *Los diarios pasaron rápidamente a temas tales como las últimas performances de Emerson Fittipaldi, el precio del bife, las ejecuciones o atentados de turno, la mode retro y el nuevo boom de Hollywood.*

The newspapers rapidly moved on to topics such as Emerson Fittipaldi's latest performances, the price of beef, the executions and assassination attempts of the day, 'retro' fashion and the new Hollywood 'boom'.

(VI) *La soledad es mi fuerza, Julio. La soledad y mi don de transformarme infinitamente, llegar al enemigo bajo las apariencias más dispares.*

Solitude is my forte, Julio. Solitude and my gift of transforming myself over and over again, of reaching the enemy by dint of the most disparate disguises.

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